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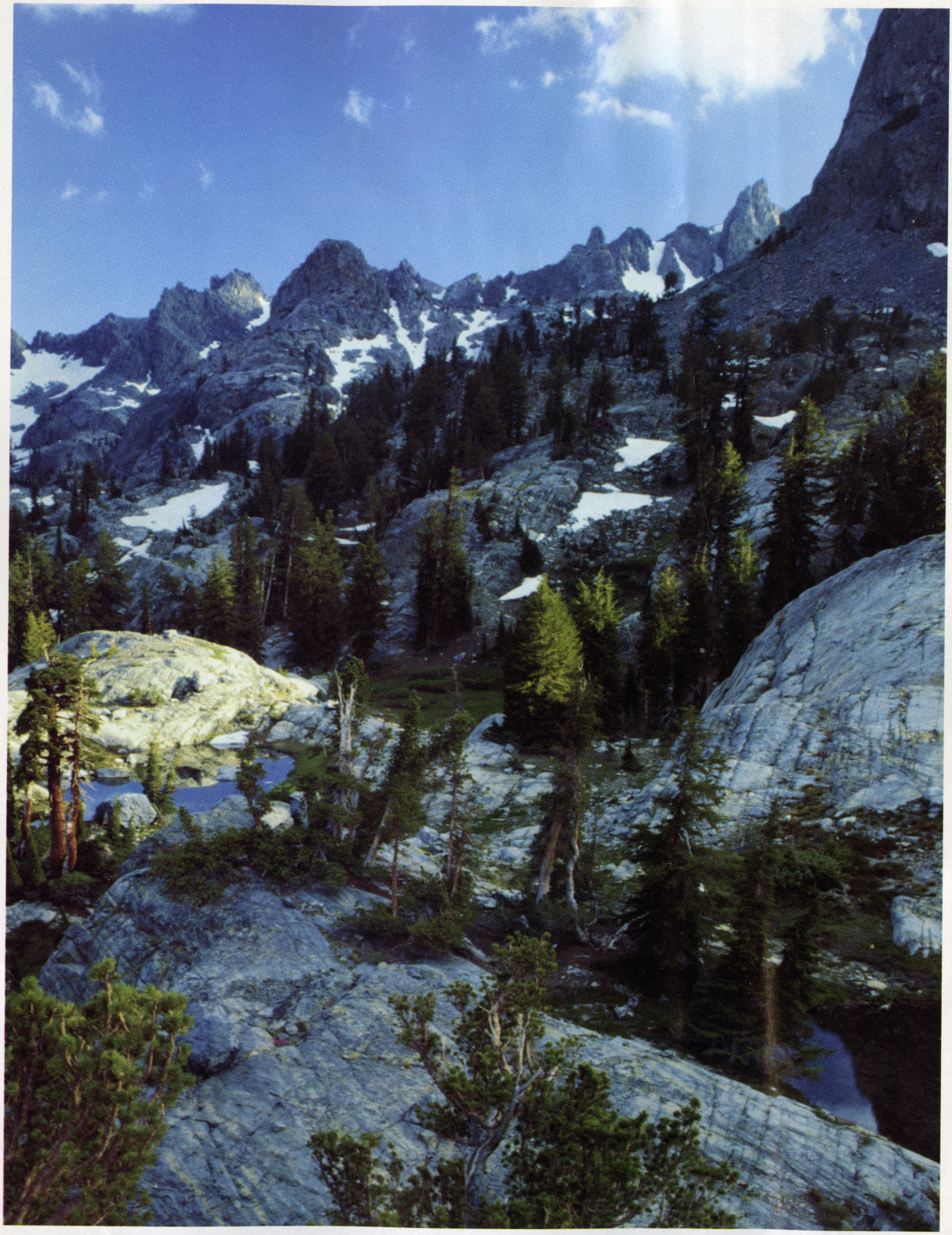

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LETTERS

Thanks so much for your well written article in support of Senator Cranston's California Desert Protection Act in the Jan/Dec issue of Sierra Life. Having lived in our Inyo County desert country for years and having driven and hiked most of it, I can't express enough my gratitude for the vision you have shown in your magazine. We desperately need to save what remains of our western wildlands before destructive forces destroy it forever.

Expanding Death Valley National Monument to include Eureka Valley, Saline Valley and northern Panamint Valley is something long overdue. This action can do nothing but bring benefit to our area. Protecting the land and increasing the tourist dollar should be the agenda of our elected officials.

I would like to point out that several lesser-known areas also are deserving of our support. They too are in Senator Cranston's bill. These areas in Inyo County are the southern Funeral Range that includes Pyramid Peak, Greenwater Valley and Range, the Resting Springs and Nopah Range wildernesses and the Inyo Mountains. Other additions to Death Valley National Monument and additions to the National Wilderness System within S.7. must also be watched closely.

New wildlands are not being created. California's population continues to soar. Pressure on our last remaining pristine lands has never been so ominous. This will be our last real opportunity for preserving these increasingly valuable lands. Open space and silence will dwindle ever further if we fail. My sincerest thanks for joining the efforts to save the California Desert.

—Michael Prather,
Lone Pine, CA

FROM THE PUBLISHER

One would think that the Publisher of Sierra Life would have the good sense not to get lost in the woods. Of course, those of you who know me well would think it unusual of me not to get lost in the woods.

It had been a tough week . . . high stress and no chance to escape from the office in the "City".

And then it happened. I looked at my calendar and saw business meetings in Fresno on the 18th. I cautiously lifted the next page of the calendar. Eureka! It was blank. A blank Saturday and I would be just a few miles from the Giant Sequoias.

I parked my car at the edge of the forest and dived in—leaving behind my Diet Coke and benadryl (I'm allergic to pine).

The stillness of the forest captivated me. I walked for what seemed like a short distance, and then stopped to admire the last sunlight of the day sparkling through the dense forest.

Last sunlight? Dense forest? Allergy to pine? No benadryl? NO DIET COKE? Okay, I thought, which way is out?

I communed with nature until quite late that night. The allergy symptoms became worse with each breath and I wondered if giving oneself an emergency tracheotomy was possible. I stumbled into a rock and sat down for a while to hyperventilate. And then, through the trees, the headlights of a car. I had found the road again.

After downing a benadryl with a Diet Coke, I looked down the road leading back to the "City" and then back into the still, dark forest.

It was a tough choice.

Sandie Pramann
Publisher

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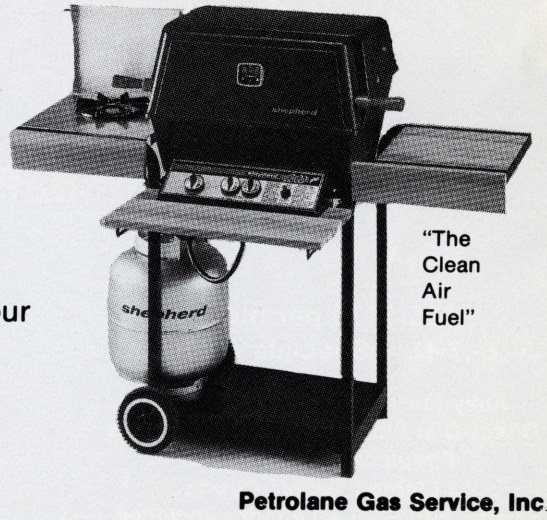

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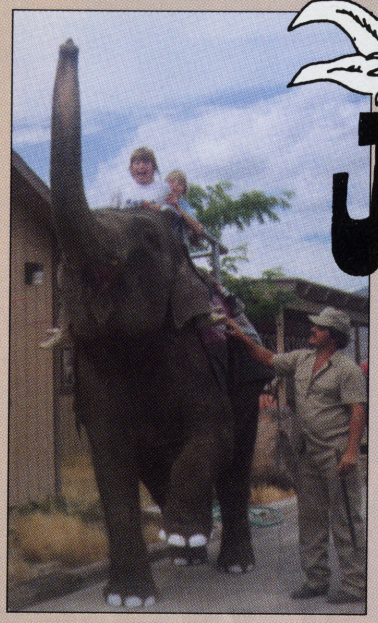

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OUR COVER: Rainbow Falls near Mammoth can be reached by hiking trail or through Red's Meadow Pack Station. Photo by Christopher Talbot Frank

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A Place Called Home

California's State Mining and Mineral Exhibit finally gets a permanent home in Mariposa.

PHOTO BY LEROY RADANOVICH

PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLDENBELL MINING CORP., PART OF THE ABM MINING GROUP OF COMPANIES.

GOLD SPECIMEN EMBEDDED IN QUARTZ

by Ted C. Hilliard

Gold!

John Sutter's discovery of a gold nugget in the Sierra Nevada foothills in 1848 launched California's Gold Rush era, forever changing the face of the state. Mining—the first and most important industry in the early years of California—continues to play a vital role in its economy today.

The southern Mother Lode community of Mariposa was a center of the early mining industry. Relics of the Gold Rush era, including the buildings of an old mining town and the haunts of historic figures such as Joaquin Murietta and John C. Fremont, can be found in and near Mariposa township.

Later this year Mariposa will get another attraction, with the completion at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds of one of the most unusual museums in the United States. The California State Mining and Mineral Exhibit, already on interim display in Mariposa, will be moved into its new and permanent home there as soon as the building is completed.

The state's mineral collection, which will be on display in the new museum, is one of the largest in the world. It was housed in San Francisco from 1880 until 1983. When a state budget shortfall occurred in 1982, the decision was to made to stop funding rent to display the collection, then housed in the Ferry Building. The County of Mariposa applied to receive the collection, which was moved there and placed in storage in mid-1983. An interim display, numbering several hundred specimens, was opened in 1986 and will remain open until the collection is moved to the new facility at the fairgrounds, one mile south of the town of Mariposa on Highway 49.

The new building, unique among American museums, will include a 150-foot horseshoe-shaped tunnel dug into an adjacent hillside. The tunnel was excavated in 1958 by the Mariposa Fair to give fairgoers the experience of visiting the setting of an authentic hard rock mine. Rooms carved into the granite along the tunnel contain mannequins posed in tableaux of drilling, blasting and ore-loading. A visible vein of natural quartz runs through the tunnel, adding to the realistic appearance of a hard rock gold mine.

The tunnel entrance will be incorporated into the structure of the building and the tunnel will become a part of the museum tour.

Other exciting changes are in store for the exhibit in its new permanent home. Last year the State of California allocated $250,000 to upgrade the displays and create a more dynamic presentation of the collection. New displays will tell the story of historic and contemporary mining in the state.

In addition to the state money for upgrading the displays, money for "brick and mortar" work came from a $100,000 State Parks and Recreation Bond Act Grant and from a $150,000 contribution by ABM Gold Corporation. Goldenbell Mining, a subsidiary of ABM, is reopening two

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historic gold mines in the county and expects to begin extracting ore at about the time the museum opens.

Through the generosity of ABM and other local donors, artifacts such as rustic lumber, an old mine headframe, ore carts and hydraulic equipment have been contributed as exterior decor. A mining camp dormitory and headframe are being recreated in such detail that the structure will be able to be used as a movie set.

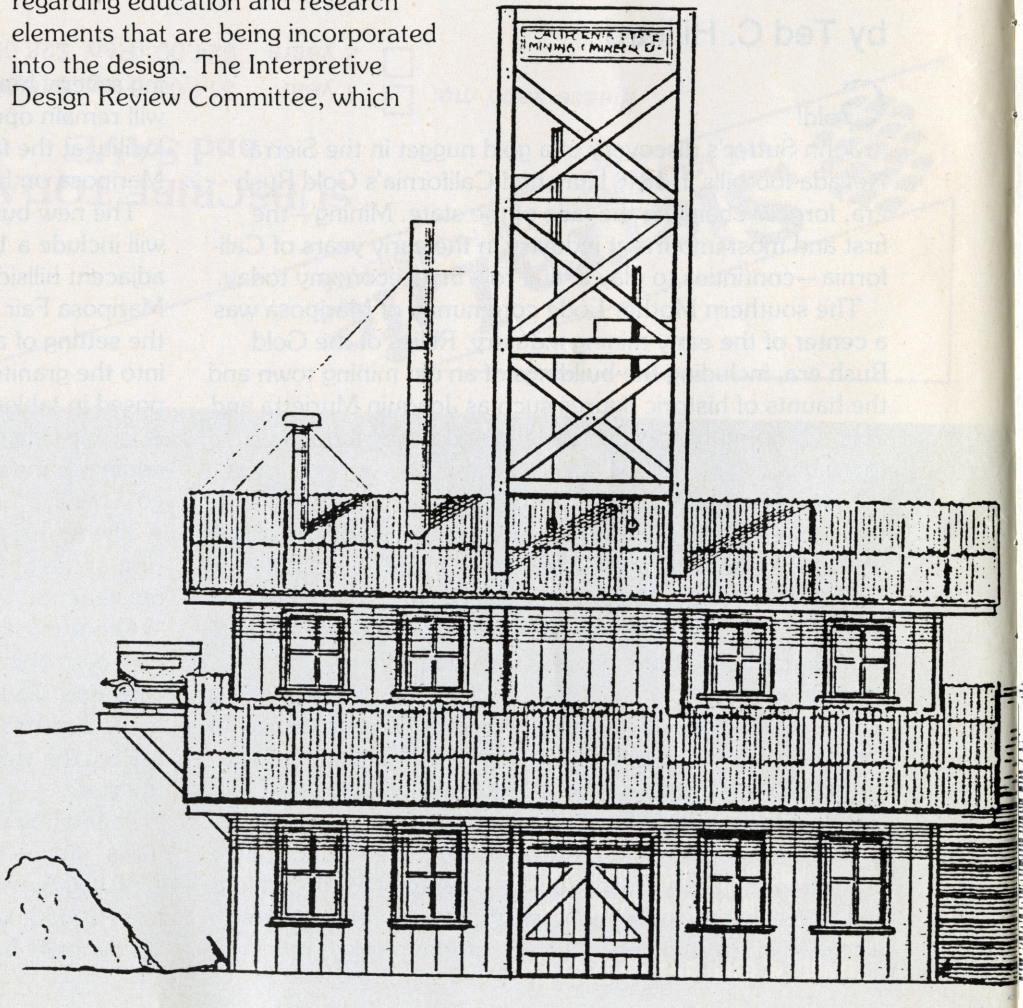
The exhibit's existing displays will be changed to be visually exciting as well as more educational. Interpretive video programs and literature, including special materials for school children, will be available. In addition to the permanent exhibits, special display areas will be available for materials on loan from private gold and mineral collections.

A full time curator will be hired before the collection is moved to the new facility and college and university instructors from throughout California have been consulted regarding education and research elements that are being incorporated into the design. The Interpretive Design Review Committee, which will oversee the interior design work, has as its advisory members the mineral curators of the Smithsonian Institution, the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History and the California Academy of Sciences.

The Exhibit's History

The California State Legislature gave recognition to the importance of the mining industry in 1880 with the creation of the State Mining Bureau. The legislative act which created the bureau also provided for the creation by the State Mineralogist of a collection of mineral specimens.

Although the State Exhibit did not become official until 1880, many of the specimens included in it had been gathered by miners years earlier or in geological surveys of the state conducted as early as 1853. A number of the specimens in the collection are of types no longer obtain-



able or represent unique examples of particular mineral elements.

The Exhibit's early days in San Francisco were as rough and unsettled as the frontier times. It was moved a number of times before finding its longtime home in the Ferry Building in 1899. Several robberies in 1882 depleted the collection of gold specimens and the danger of fire was an ever-present specter in the early locations. Remarkably, the collection and its accompanying library escaped damage during the earthquake and fires of 1906.

The Exhibit was a hit with the public from the beginning. In 1892, the State Mineralogist reported over 100,000 visitors and indicated plans for use of the Exhibit by high schools.

The Exhibit remains the property of the State of California, under the auspices of the Department of Conservation. A group of private citizens formed the non-profit California Mineral Exhibit Association soon after the Exhibit was moved to Mariposa and entrusted to the county government. Dedicated to protecting and enhancing the collection, they worked toward obtaining funding for the construction of the permanent museum. The CMEA arranged for the collection's first public showing in the county at the 1983 Mariposa County Fair. The group later changed its name to the California State Mining and Mineral Exhibit Association in recognition of the role that mining continues to play in the California economy. The new museum will include displays of current mining activities, showing the impact of mining and mineral commodities in our daily lives.

The Interim Museum

Even before it moves into its new home, a visit to the interim State Exhibit in Mariposa is an excellent way to begin a tour of the area. It is easy to find, located adjacent to the Best Western Motel at the junction of highways 140 and 49 at the south end of town. It has ample parking, including bus parking, handicapped access, and public restroom facilities.

While only a small portion of the

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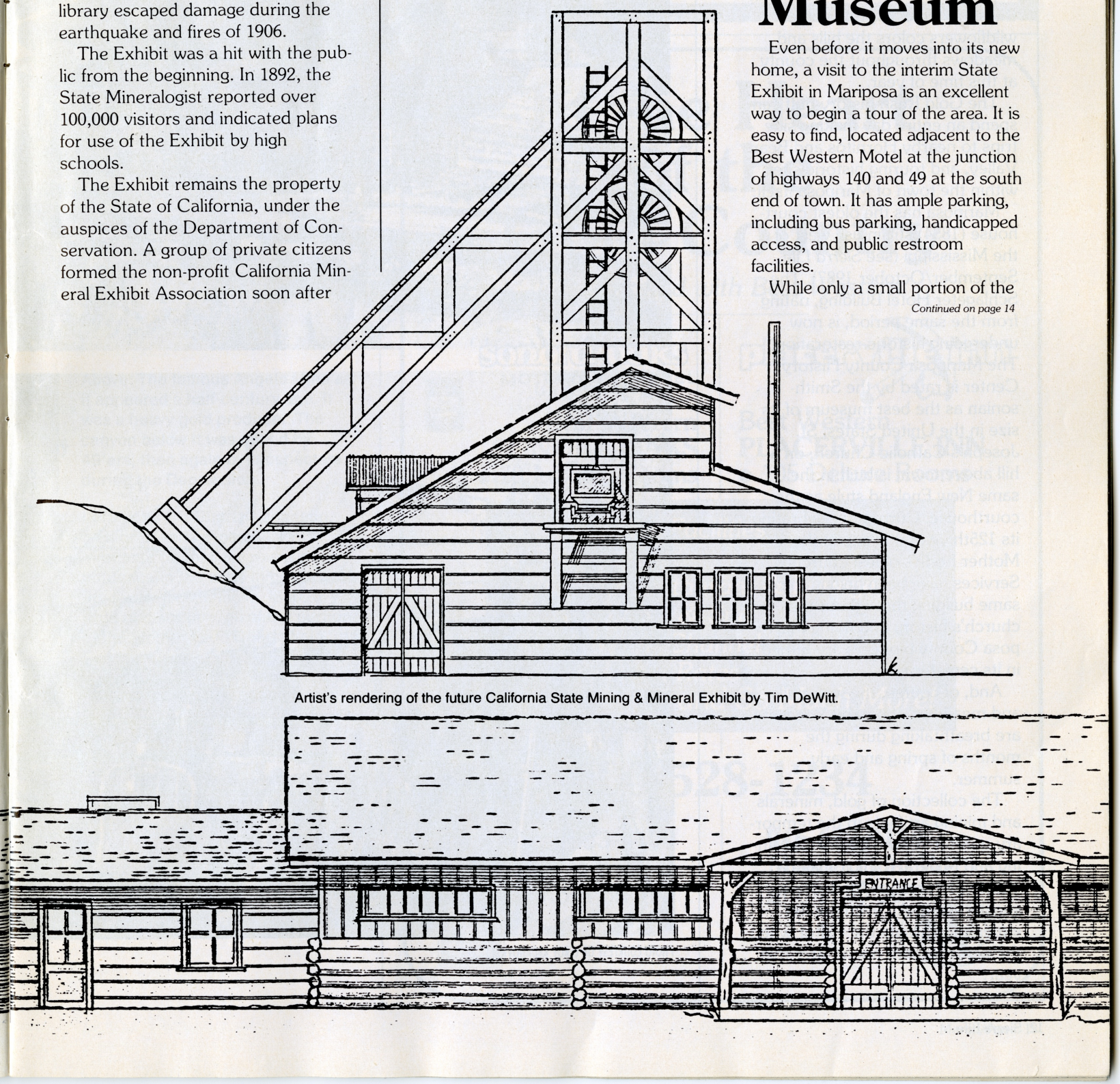


Artist's rendering of the future California State Mining & Mineral Exhibit by Tim DeWitt.

Other Mariposa Attractions

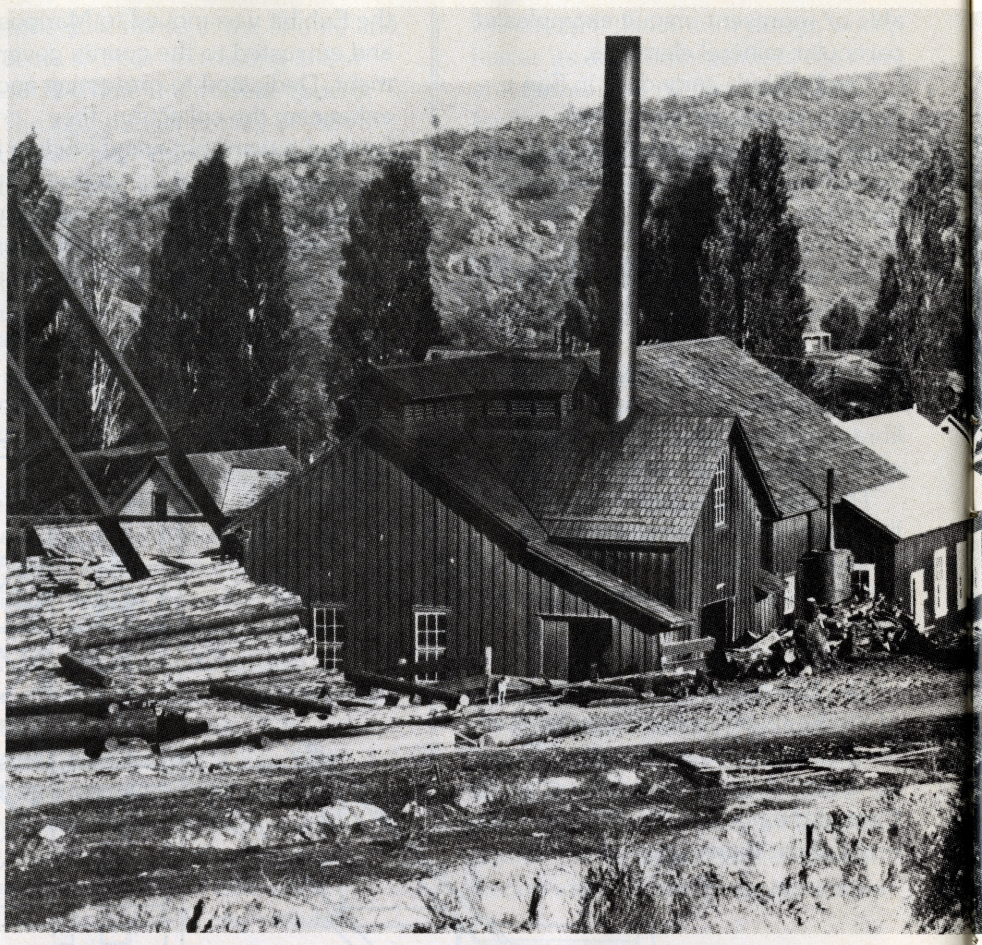
The Mineral Exhibit is only one of many exciting things to see and experience in Mariposa County in the springtime. A profusion of wildflowers colors the hills and meadows throughout the county at this time of year.

The Gold Rush history buff can spend an entire day making side trips to nearby Hornitos and Bear Valley, and touring historic sites within the town of Mariposa itself.

Mariposa has the oldest courthouse (1854) still in use west of the Mississippi (see *Sierra Life*, September/October 1987). The Schlageter Hotel Building, dating from the same period, is now undergoing historic restoration. The Mariposa County History Center is rated by the Smithsonian as the best museum of its size in the United States. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, on a hill above town, is built in the same New England style as the courthouse. Currently celebrating its 125th year, it is one of the Mother Lode's oldest churches. Services have been held in the same building throughout the church's history and many Mariposa County pioneers are buried in its cemetery.

And, of course, the waterfalls and meadows of nearby Yosemite are breathtaking during the months of spring and early summer.

The collection of gold, minerals and mining artifacts in the temporary quarters of the California Mining and Mineral Exhibit make a visit to picturesque Mariposa a special event. An even greater experience awaits the visitor when the new museum opens later this year.



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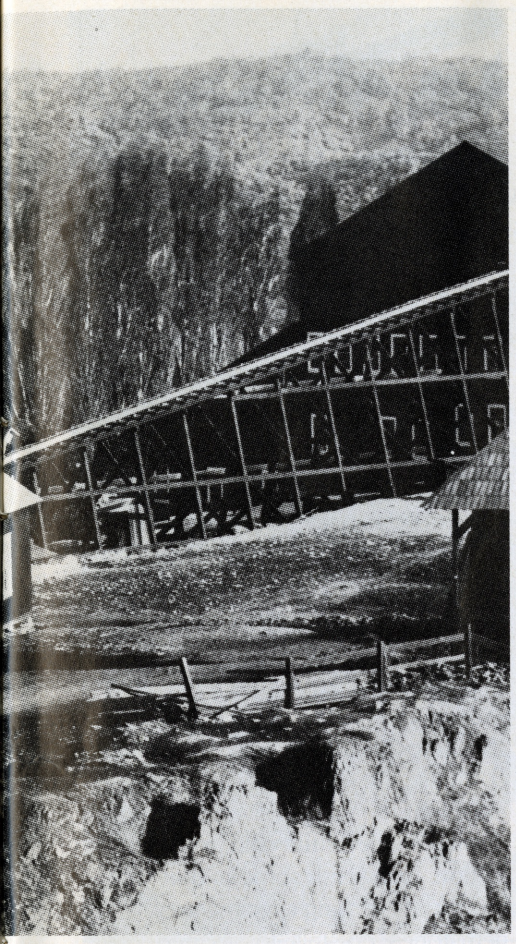

PHOTO COURTESY OF LEROY RADANOVICH

Above: The famous Angels Mine as it appeared a half-century ago. It was a heavy gold producer. The canyon below it was mined by 49'ers, then again by prospectors during the Depression.

Left: John F. "Quartz" Johnson, a colorful early prospector in Mariposa County. He was a major influence in the early mining era of the County, claiming in 1850, by right of discovery, all of the portion of the Mother Lode Quartz Vein from Coulterville south to Mt. Ophir. He named that lode The Great Johnson Vein. The present community of Bear Valley, near Mariposa, was first named Johnsonville in his honor. In 1859, he purchased virtually the entire town of Mariposa from John C. Fremont and partners for $15,000.

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The interim museum is located at the junction of highways 140 and 49.

Continued from page 11

15,000 to 20,000 specimens that comprise the state collection is on exhibit at the interim site, it does display nearly all the gold in the collection, along with some of the more eye-catching specimens of gemstones, crystals, fossils, and fluorescent rock. It also features cases of antique mining artifacts and a facsimile mining tunnel.

A gift shop offers good buys on handcrafted jewelry, gold panning supplies and books on California and Mother Lode History. Exhibit manager Lee Hanna can provide directions and travel information for those who want to visit other nearby mining-related attractions. The museum and shop are open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is $2 for adults and $1 for seniors. Children under 12 are admitted free.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE HOEPER

Weekend gold panners near Jamestown in Tuolumne County find traces of gold.

Going for the Gold

Mining Operations Are Alive and Well in the Mother Lode

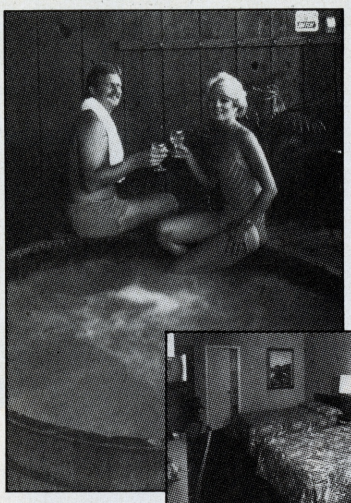
by George Hoeper

Less than two hours from teeming metropolitan streets, the tree-lined streams and deep ledges of California's Mother Lode are once again yielding gold in substantial amounts to weekend panners and professional miners alike. The steady rise in the price of gold over the past three years appears to have brought new confidence to the gold-mining industry.

Now, for the first time since 1941, major mining properties along the western slope of the Sierra are reopening. In 1987, the California mining industry produced one-half million troy ounces of gold, the State Division of Mines and Geology estimates. Most of that production came from three open-pit mines in Mariposa, Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties, but other mines are due to go into operation soon.

Furthermore, from Merced and Mariposa Counties northward, recreational gold mining is becoming an increasingly popular foothill attraction. Few thrills compare with discovering flakes of yellow metal—glistening wet and shiny—in the bottom of a swirling pan.

In Tuolumne County, Jamestown



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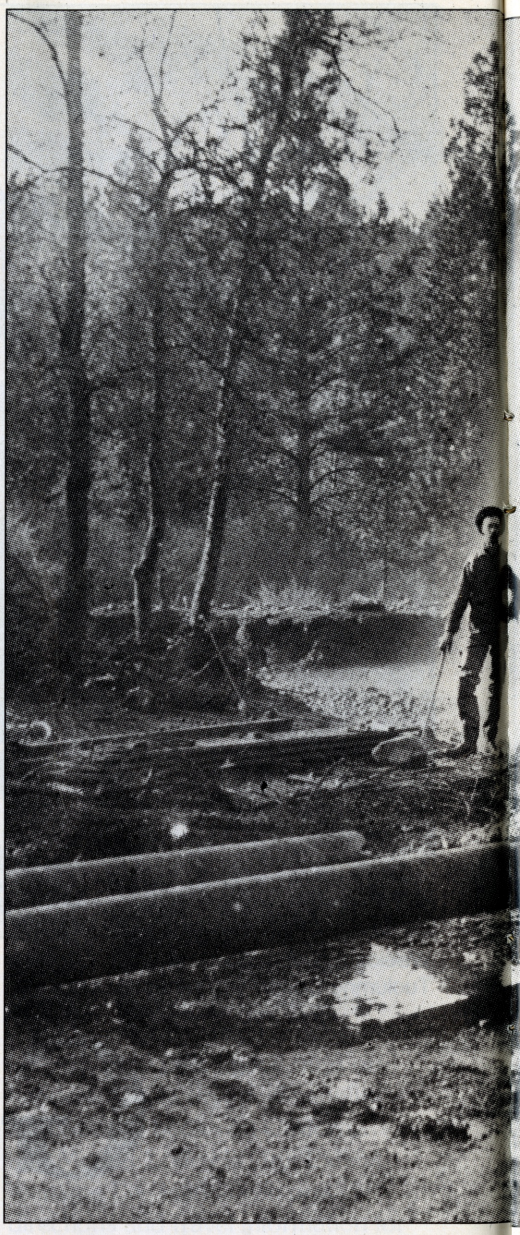

prospector and gold trader Ralph Shock, of Gold Prospecting Expeditions, has built a successful business teaching tourists how and where to pan for gold and guiding them on mining trips.

They arrive, these modern-day argonauts, in motorhomes, pickup trucks and travel trailers, and sometimes, more unobtrusively, in automobiles bearing out-of-state license plates. For, in addition to the weekenders or semi-professionals—using sophisticated suction dredges to mine the Tuolumne, Stanislaus, American, Yuba, Feather or Merced Rivers—come briefcase-carrying representatives of multi-national mining companies ready to spend millions reaching and extracting the precious metals.

Why the sudden spurt of interest in

PHOTO COURTESY OF LEROY RADANOVICH

Hydraulic mining shallow placer gravel near the town of Mountain Ranch during the 1870s. The rising price of gold has renewed interest in these old mining areas.

gold mining? And why is this interest centering on the Mother Lode? "Well, for one thing, there's still an awful lot of gold here," said mining engineer and consultant Willard Fuller, of San Andreas. "Mineralogists tell us 80 percent of the Mother Lode's gold still lies untouched in its deep veins, and that, of course, is why the mining companies are coming here."

"There are a lot of mining people—big companies—seriously poking around the Mother Lode," said Ray Hunter, of Jackson, mining consultant and former executive director of the California Mining Association.

Hunter, commenting on the increased gold activity, pointed to several factors, starting with President Reagan's approval of the gold coinage bill, which authorized the minting of one-ounce American Eagle and other coins. Gold is also increasingly used in high-tech industries, he added.

Sheldon Engler, economist and commodities analyst for Bank of America, said some people are looking to gold as a hedge against inflation and the decline of the dollar. Gold averaged $406 an ounce in the first quarter of 1987, according to Engler, and closed at $486 on December 31. He predicts gold will average $490 an ounce in 1988.

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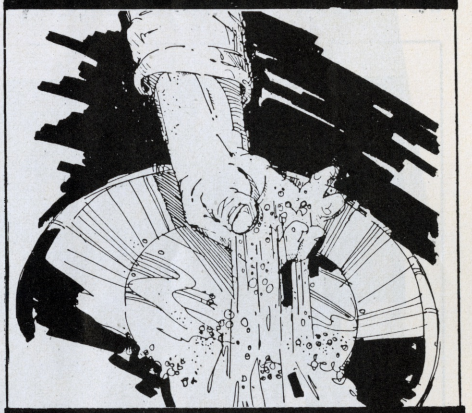
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unlike those earlier this century, now begin operation only after detailed environmental impact assessments have been approved by county, state and federal agencies. "Environmentally, mining now must be squeaky clean," explained Peter Dohm, vice president of Condor Mineral Management, a Sonora-based consulting and engineering firm.

Presently in operation are three major commercial gold mines: the Mt. Gaines (near Hornitos, in Mariposa County); the old Harvard Mine at Jamestown (in Tuolumne County); and the historic Carson Hill Mine (in Calaveras County, on the north side of New Melones Reservoir). With all three worked as open-pit mines, each processes several hundred tons of ore per day.

The mine at Jamestown, owned by the Vancouver, B.C.-based ABM Corporation, produced 130,000 troy ounces of gold in 1987, making it number ten in gold production in the U.S. that year.

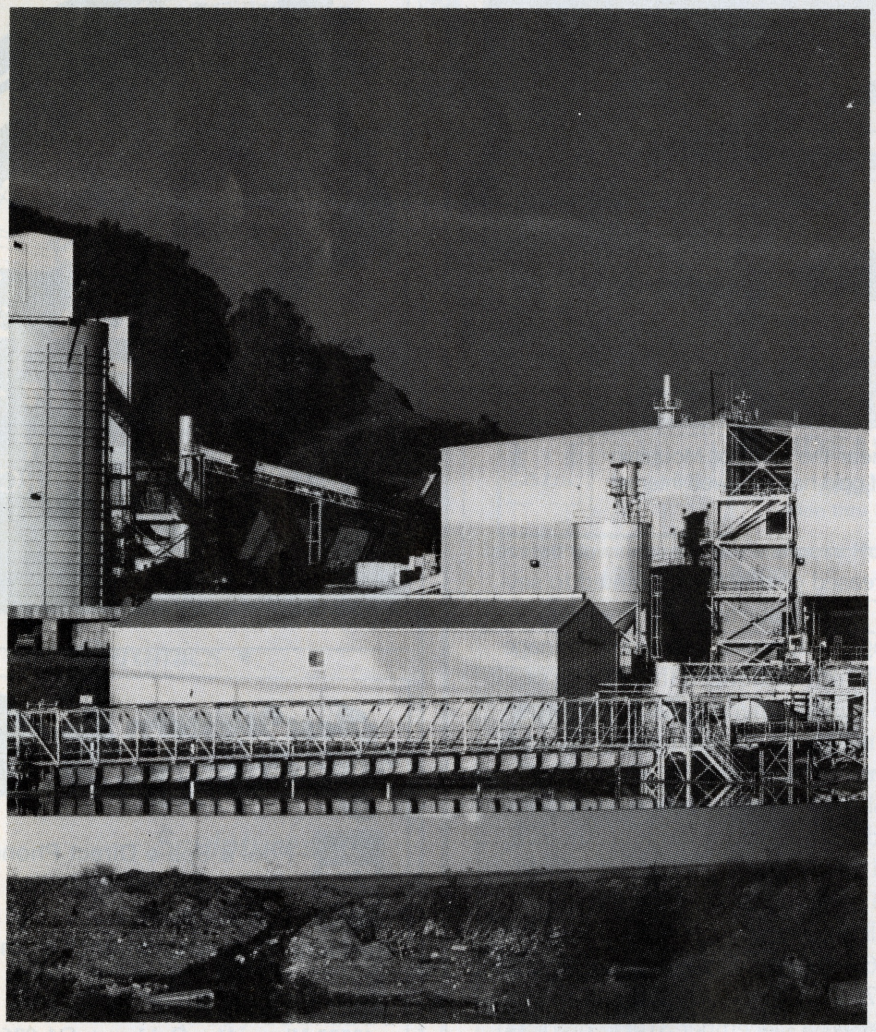
The Carson Hill Mine is credited with turning out, between 1850 and 1942, in excess of $300 million, at the old price of gold. The biggest piece of gold ever found in California, a 195-pound nugget, was mined at Carson Hill.

Near Downieville (in Sierra County at the extreme north end of the Sierra gold belt), the Sixteen-to-One, famous for more than half-a-century for its rich, high-grade gold, is once again in operation, as is the nearby Brush Creek Mine.

But, before 1988 draws to a close, several more major gold mines, including the famous Pine Tree-Josephine Mine (on the old Fremont Grant, north of Mt. Bullion), are expected to be producing gold. Golden Bell Resources and ABM Corporation now have completed the mine's environmental impact reports. Golden Bell plans to operate the mine as an open pit and is paying for relocation of Highway 49, which runs through it.

Meridien Resources, a subsidiary of Burlington Northern Railroad, has finalized its environmental impact report on the Mountain King Mine (at Hodson, in Calaveras County), which it proposes to re-open with open-pit ore production.

In Amador County, Callahan Mining Company of Phoenix has done extensive exploration drilling in and around the old Keystone Mine, at Amador City. "It appears there is going to be continued activity in gold mining throughout California," said Dohm.



Modern Mining Operation

Rebirth of a Mine

Goldenbell and the Pine Tree-Josephine

By George Hoeper

One of the oldest and most productive mining locations in the Mother Lode Country, the Pine Tree-Josephine property, is about to assume new life as the site of a modern mining operation. Located on 3,200 acres flanking Highway 49, some 13 miles north of the town of Mariposa, the gold-rich property has been acquired by the Vancouver-based Goldenbell Mining Corporation.

The Pine Tree-Josephine holdings are richly steeped in the history of the Mother Lode, having originally been discovered in the late 1840s and developed by California pioneer

Continued on page 59

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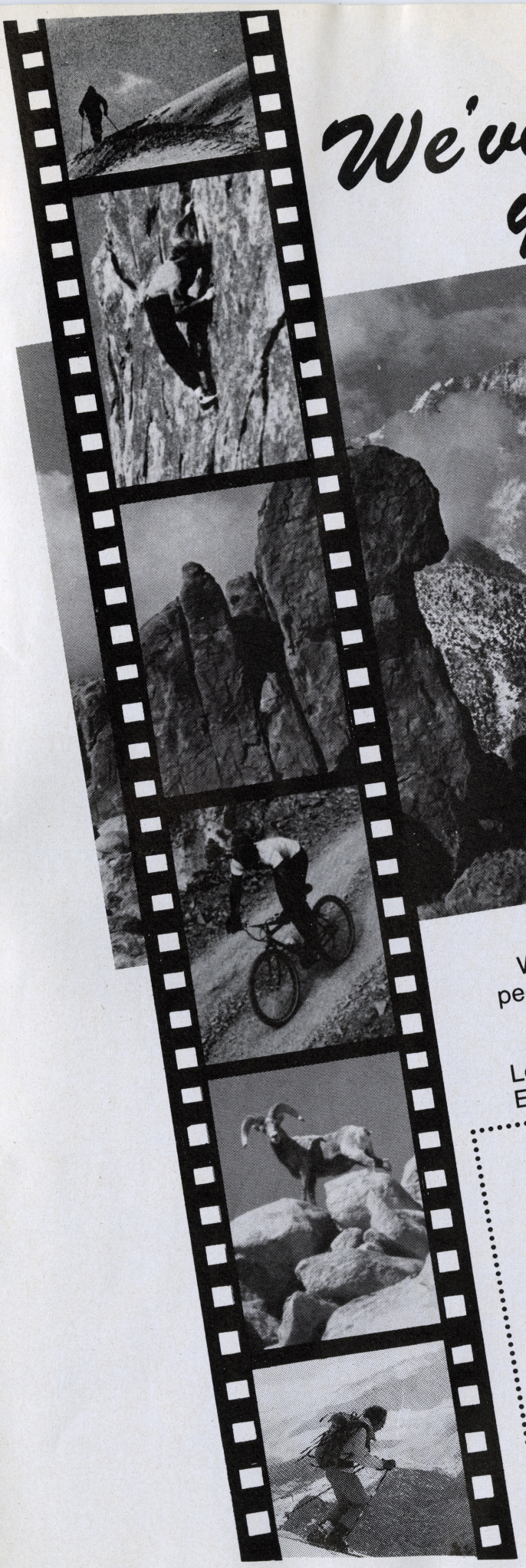

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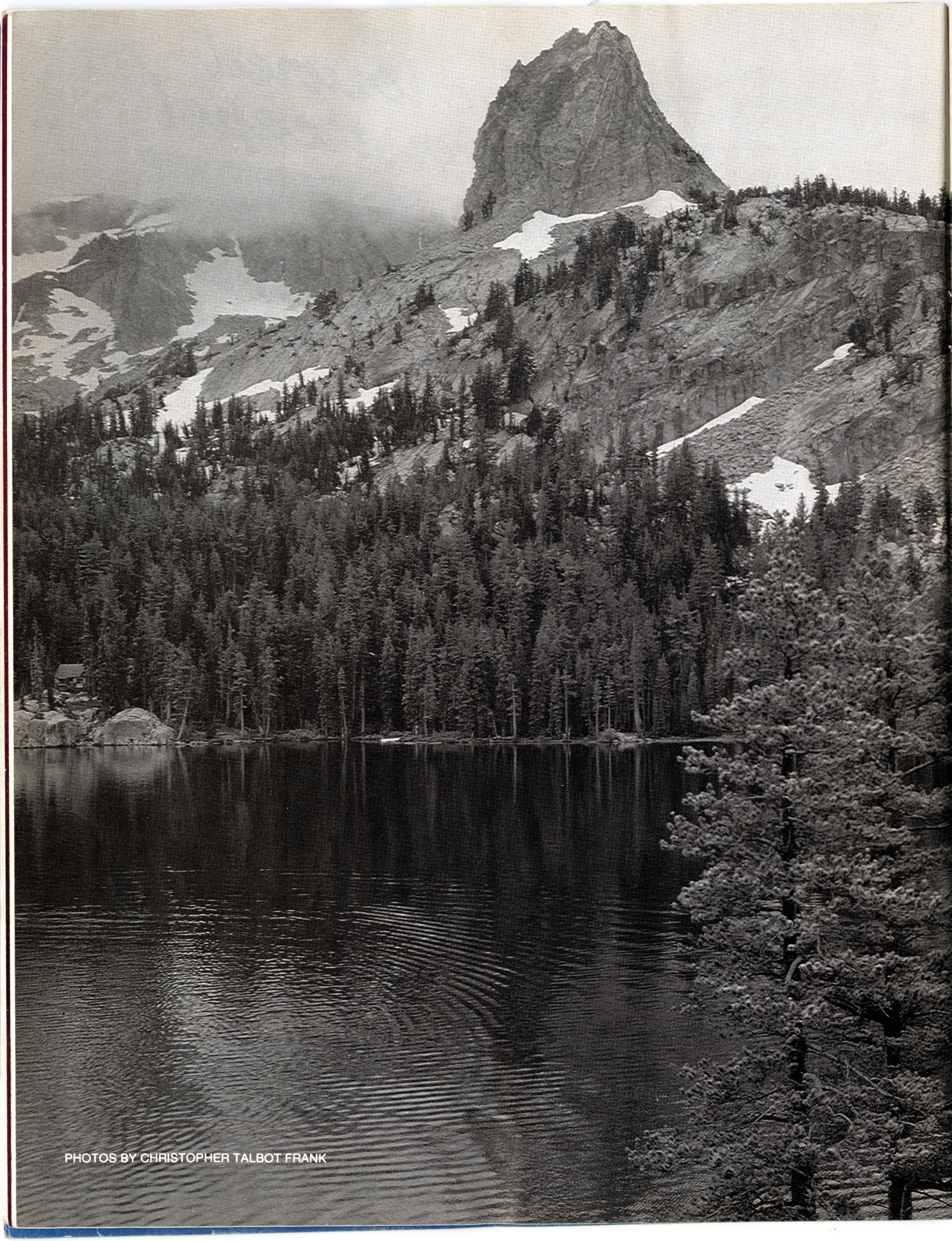

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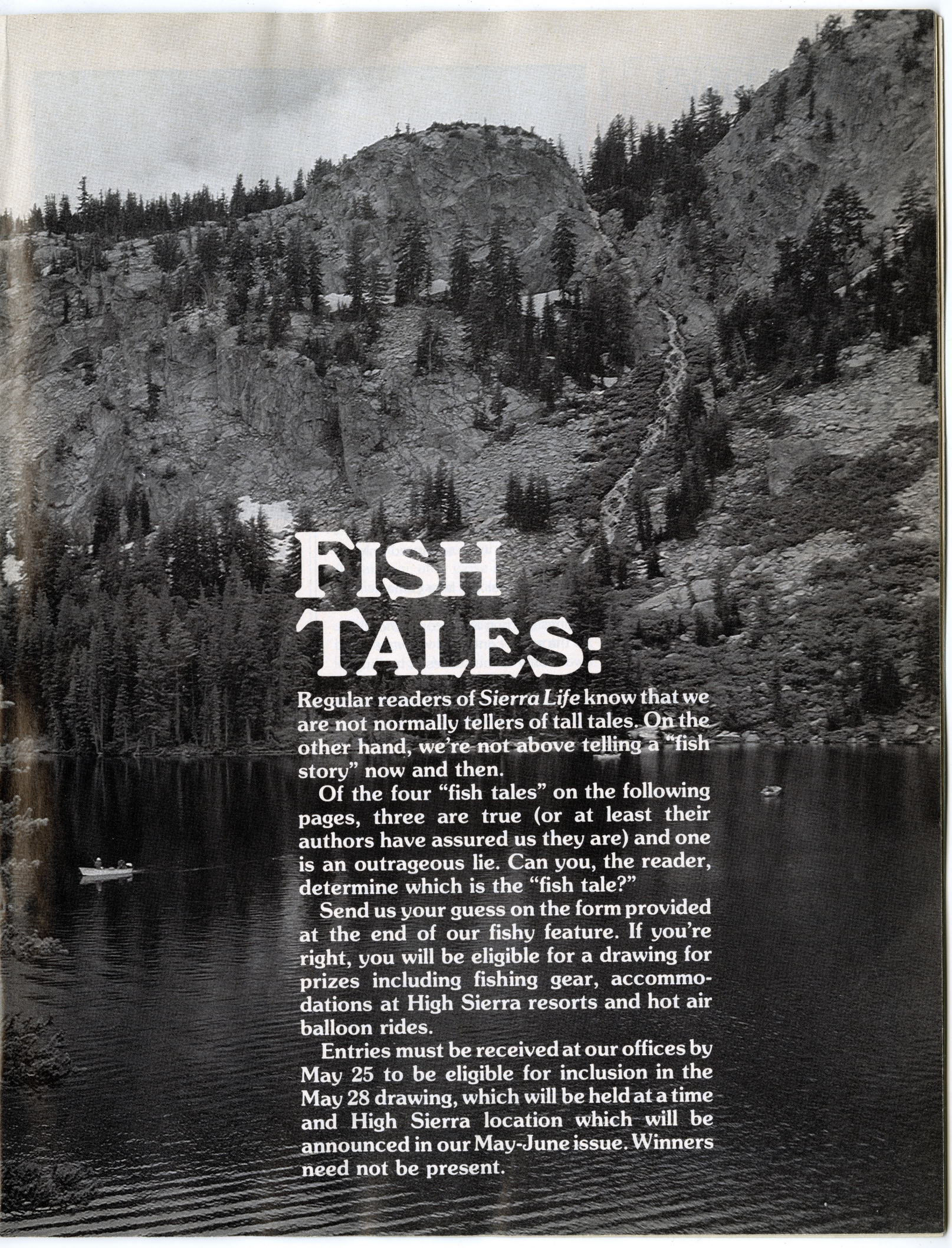


FISH TALES:

Regular readers of *Sierra Life* know that we are not normally tellers of tall tales. On the other hand, we're not above telling a "fish story" now and then.

Of the four "fish tales" on the following pages, three are true (or at least their authors have assured us they are) and one is an outrageous lie. Can you, the reader, determine which is the "fish tale?"

Send us your guess on the form provided at the end of our fishy feature. If you're right, you will be eligible for a drawing for prizes including fishing gear, accommodations at High Sierra resorts and hot air balloon rides.

Entries must be received at our offices by May 25 to be eligible for inclusion in the May 28 drawing, which will be held at a time and High Sierra location which will be announced in our May-June issue. Winners need not be present.

The Fishing Lesson

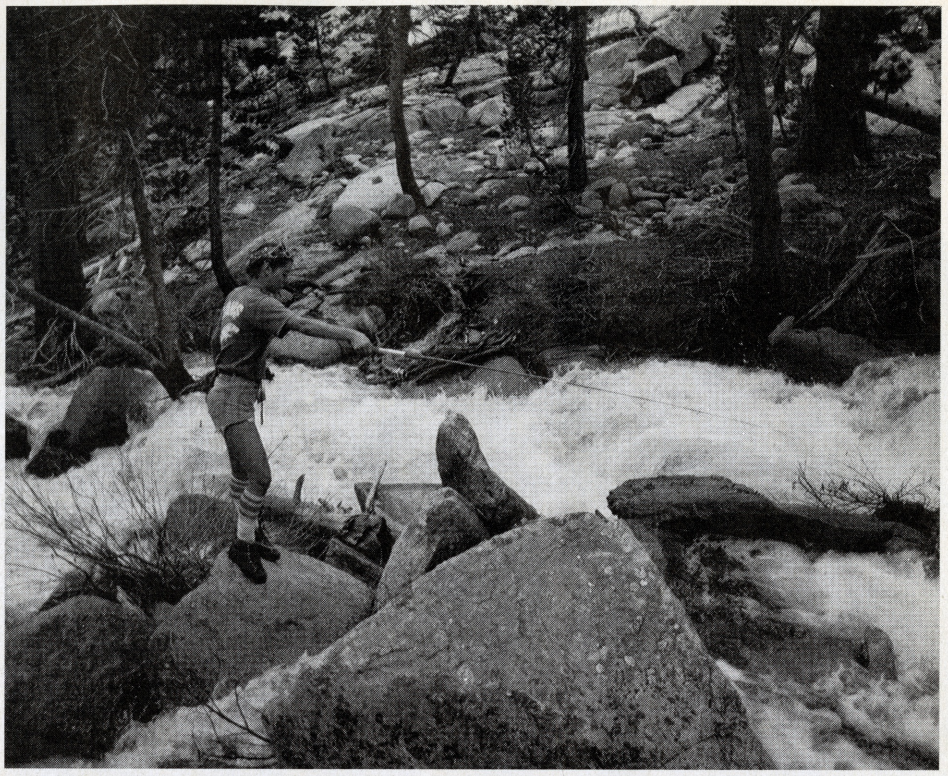
by Z. Didden

It was one of those sparkling June days that only the High Sierra could produce. The water of Lake Crowley was a shimmering blue, reflecting the surrounding mountains like a giant mirror — not even the slightest ripple disturbed its tranquility. While distant snow-capped peaks showed evidence of the preceding winter, this day already hinted of the heat we had so often endured in the past.

Our foursome was prepared for the intense sunshine. Barbara and I slathered our swimsuited bodies with sun tan lotion. My husband, Fred, opted for an old french-cuffed white shirt, the cuffs of which he could roll down to cover his hands should they start to burn. Larry, who already had a good tan, was clad in a white t-shirt and shorts, accenting his deep color. We all wore dark glasses and big-brimmed hats as we hauled lunch, tackle and cooler (full of ice-cold beer) to the boat.

The lake was already heavily populated by the occupants of other boats, but the trout seemed so plentiful that no one objected as we found a place to anchor in their midst. It was a glorious day of brilliant sunshine, the stillness interrupted only by shouts of "You have a bite!" followed by frenzied activity. Other boaters were enjoying similar success and we anticipated our evening meal as more large fish were added to the stringer. The hot sun, reflected off the water, was becoming almost oppressive and we debated putting up the top.

Most of the anglers were in McGee bay, in the northwestern sector of the lake, though many other boaters crisscrossed the lake, cruising slowly as they trolled. Looking down toward the south end, which houses the launching ramps and rental boats, I noticed a strange apparition. Steam seemed to be rising from the water. A black cloud appeared overhead. In a matter of moments, we were in the midst of a



blizzard so blinding we couldn't see the boats that were anchored only feet away.

From all over the lake came sounds of anchors being hauled, engines starting and people shouting. As the snow continued we were aware only of the senses of hearing and touch. Sight had deserted us. It was numbingly cold. The men managed to get the anchors up and the fish in, but we could not put the frozen top up as the windshield was coated with ice and snow, further diminishing visibility. Larry found an old piece of tarp and threw it over Barbara and me while Fred stood up, trying to see over the windshield, as we slowly moved out — hoping we wouldn't collide with another fleeing boat.

We heard the patrol boat broadcasting orders to head for shore — but where was the shore? Fred dared not run the boat at speed, for fear of hitting others, so we slowly plowed our way through the blinding storm, surrounded by unseen vessels, their occupants yelling directions. The waves accompanying the storm bounced us unmercifully, but at least indicated the southerly direction in which we were heading.

A trip which ordinarily would have taken ten minutes stretched to a freezing 45. The whiteout lifted slightly as we neared the marina and we could see an armada of craft jockeying for position through the narrow inlet. This was a time when courtesy would seem imperative, but few people practiced it.

We finally were able to make it to our dock and, after tying down the boat, we forced our frozen legs up the ramp to the office. Fred's eyebrows were frosted with ice, Larry's tan had turned blue, and Barbara and I provoked raised eyebrows as we entered the crowded building clad only in bathing suits and sun hats. A roaring fire had been built in the potbelly stove and a knot of shivering fishermen crowded 'round. The sea of humanity parted as they saw our group entering, allowing us some of the warmth.

Everyone was talking at once about the sudden, unpredicted storm. Normally, red flags would fly if there was doubtful weather and the patrol boats would hustle people off the lake if stormy conditions threatened, but this one had caught us all unaware. Slowly, near hysteria gave way to laughter as the refugees from the storm shared descriptions of what had happened to *them*.

We eventually became thawed enough to make our way to the car

where we had left our heavy clothing, then on to our cozy cabin for a bit of internal "anti-freeze." Our world, which only a short time ago had been summer-like, was clothed in a blanket of white. The departing weather front revealed the lake—and the many boats that had found shore the hard way.

This day taught us a lesson we would never forget—the Sierra is unpredictable. Never again would we leave shore without taking apparel for *any* kind of weather conditions, regardless of the season of the year.

Fishing the Loophole

by William D. Dooley

A great number of people (fishermen and otherwise) have endeavored over the years to lighten their tax burdens by claiming their hobbies as some sort of tax-exempt activity. (The theory: Hunting, fishing or whatever is a form of stress-management and, therefore, deductible under the heading of medical expenses. For instance, my 40-foot cabin cruiser, if I had one, would be deductible as transportation since it would be used to transport me to and from my stress-management appointments. You get the idea.) I mention all of this only by way of pointing out to the reader that this article will not in any way help him with his tax burden. Rather, the loophole mentioned in the title refers to an apparent oversight in the fishing regulations of our great state.

Over the past 20 years or so which make up my fishing career I have used a multitude of techniques, from size-28 flies to five pounds of night crawlers on a small grappling hook. On rare occasions, the mysterious force which motivates and/or drives fishermen had driven some past the legal bounds of the sport. (A few years back, while I was doing some channel-widening work on our local river—with dynamite, of course—it led to all sorts of vicious but unfounded rumors about my activities. Apparently some of the uninvited lookers-on couldn't figure out why I hadn't waited until the river was dry.)

This same irresistible force, on other occasions, has driven fishermen beyond the normal bounds of sanity, leading very nicely to a recounting of the following episode.

One day in the late fall, a fisherman by the name of Pete Carpenter, whom I call a friend, stopped by to impart details of "The World's Greatest Fishing Secret." Anyone who knows Pete knows that this was one of a series. Pete and I have floundered around together for years—whenever we both could arrange weekend passes from our respective families, and to hear him tell it, he's been fishing since he was old enough to light a fuse. His enthusiasm—like his techniques—knows no bounds.

Pete's latest "secret plan" appeared to have some merit. Since we couldn't seem to entice the fish to us, we would go to the fish. Apparently, after close scrutiny of the fish and game regulations, Pete could find no prohibition against just swimming up to the fish and grabbing them. I could see a few problems, though. Most of the fish, I figured, would probably try to avoid capture.

Pete's solution to this problem was to pick the coldest water available so, in theory at least, the fish would be very lethargic and easier to grab. All we would have to do, he said, would be to pack my diving gear, by sled, about ten miles across deep snow to a frozen lake. He suggested one of the more remote Sierra lakes, just in case he had missed something in his interpretation of the regulations. Upon arrival, we would dig a hole through the ice at a spot where a stream runs into the lake. Such an area would be more likely to have fish because of its increased supply of food and oxygen. Pete would then lower me by safety line under the ice—where I would grab a couple of limits right quick. Pete also finds the regulations somewhat hazy in the area of fishing with a hand line, and figured that, if caught holding my safety line, he could claim that I was simply a large spinner.

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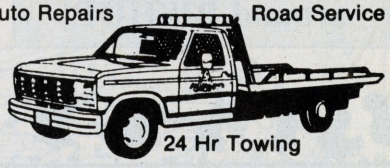
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Now I was a bit doubtful about all this. I am one of the few people who cannot just grab fish. I have had whole boxes of fish sticks swim gleefully away from me as I attempted vainly to snatch them from the grocer's freezer compartment.

Nonetheless, a few very short weeks later found Pete and his "very large spinner," complete with dive gear, headed up above the 10,000-foot level in the Sierra. After locating a rather isolated lake, we sawed a hole in the ice near a stream inlet. So far, everything seemed to be going as planned. This worried me.

How cold was it? As I changed into my dive gear, I noticed that there was no visible difference in color between my bright blue wet suit and my skin.

Diving under ice can be hazardous for the uninitiated. I had taken the basic precautions of "weather-proofing" my gear, preparing it so it would not freeze while I was in the frigid water beneath the layer of ice. Also, since the dive was taking place at above 10,000 feet, I had to make adjustments to compensate for the altitude. I won't bother non-diving readers with the details, suffice it to say that I did not want Pete to have to haul the sled down the hill by himself.

After the gear was double-checked, I slid into the icy water. As usual when ice diving, I took a rather long "last look" before testing my ability to withstand claustrophobia. The Sierra was at its grandest with high snow-covered peaks surrounding our fishing hole. Before submerging, I checked once again to make sure I had the car keys. With Pete on the other end of the safety line, it seemed best to give him plenty of incentive to cooperate. The car keys represented his ride home.

The water under the ice was, as usual, extremely clear. The lack of surface turbulence, coupled with the settling out of the decaying herbaceous material normally found in mountain water provides clear water for the diver who wishes to spoil himself. The sun shining through the snow-covered ice provided a translucent, indirect lighting which added to the surrealistic atmosphere. I could hear the ice creaking and groaning quietly overhead. I soon realized I could also hear Pete stomping around impatiently. The thought of Pete trying to hot wire my car gave me added incentive to complete our mission quickly.

A quick look around revealed a couple of rather large prospective trophies. I eased into position above the trout and slowly let myself sink until I was within striking distance—or, in this case, grabbing distance. It soon became apparent that the fish had not read the script. It was true that the fish *were* moving rather lethargically, but it turned out the most lethargic trout can outswim me in my best form. After a few minutes of learning a hard, cold lesson in futility, I surfaced.

Pete does not take failure well, even after all these years of practice. Accordingly, he was not pleased to hear that I had surfaced a few fish short of two limits. In fact, it was necessary to remind him of the car keys and the prospect of a long walk ahead of him before he finally relented and let me out of the icy water. In exchange, I offered to let him keep *all* the trout we had failed to catch. I was safely out of the water and clear of my gear before he realized what he had agreed to.

After gathering our gear and making a hasty retreat down the hill to our waiting vehicle, we gratefully warmed ourselves with the car heater. Having once again suffered defeat at the hands (or in this case, fins) of our opponents, we examined our plan for flaws. After some deliberation, I vowed *always* to retain possession of the car keys. Pete said he would never again count his trout before they were snatched.

The Pond

by Samuel Pierce

I made my way slowly over the narrow dirt road. Sure that I had already traveled the prescribed mile, I stopped the car and looked at the map again. I was sure I must have taken a wrong turn even though the

row of cottonwood trees was there, just as my friend and co-worker, Walt, had drawn them. Walt had told me about this pond over coffee in our Southern California lunch room. It was near Bishop, he said, and had a great supply of good-sized catfish. The record was nearly seven pounds.

Now, going after catfish has never been my idea of a fishing trip. I'd always preferred a warm, sunny day, a cold beer, and a feisty trout — but that was before my wife developed a taste for cajun blackened catfish.

Dusk was rapidly turning into night and I wondered whether it would be better to back out or to continue on in hopes of finding a place to turn the car around. The thick, high brush on both sides of the road would make back-tracking difficult, so I went on. Just around the next bend my headlights illuminated a clearing and the unmistakable sight of cattails which meant the pond was nearby — just over a small rise.

I slid a night crawler onto my hook and cast out into the blackness. When a "plop" assured me that my bait had hit the water I sat down and opened my thermos. The coffee smelled good in the clean night air.

The sky above looked nothing like the grey night sky of the city. A million stars sparkled and, even in the nearly total blackness, I would see the massive bulk of the Sierra to the west.

Just as I had begun a peaceful contemplation of the prospects of intelligent life in other solar systems, I felt a tug on my line. I jerked my rod to set the hook, spilling hot coffee on my leg. I didn't feel any pain, though, as whatever was on the end of my line was *big* — and it was heading for the reeds. My years of trout fishing hadn't prepared me for this. A one-pound rainbow doesn't usually bend your rod in half and make your arms ache. Neither would the six-pound catfish Walt had said I'd find in this pond.

I waded out into the cold water, sinking to mid-calf in silt, and continued the pulling match. I didn't know how long my 10 lb. leader would hold up under this kind of stress, but hoped it would be long enough for me to get my adversary to shore.

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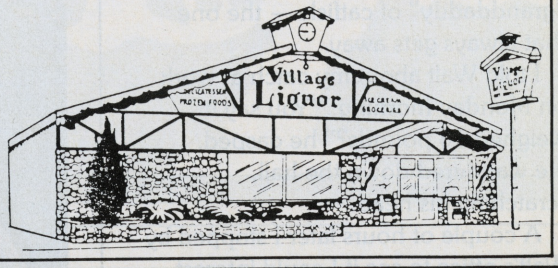

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The leader did hold for the nearly 20 minutes it took me to land the giant cat. A quick examination under the beam of my flashlight told me this was no ordinary cat. It was the "granddaddy" of catfish — the one that always gets away.

I told Walt about my catch at work on Monday morning. "You say it weighed 16 pounds?" he gasped. He wandered down the hall, scratching his head.

A couple of hours later I stopped by Walt's office to see if I could interest him in a golf game over the weekend. "He isn't in," the guy at the next desk said. "After sitting there all morning muttering something about '16 pounds' he jumped up a few minutes ago and headed for the door. Said he was going to Bishop. Wanted to do a little fishing."

Uncle Doug and the German Brown

By Dorothy Emmons

The brown shadow cruised beneath the surface of the water and Doug felt a delicate tug on his line. He flicked the pole upward and was rewarded by a heavier tug as his hook set in the trout's mouth.

This bugger is a fighter, he thought as he reeled it in.

No wonder, he exulted. *It's a German Brown. They won't usually bite on eggs. Too bad some of those high and mighty fly fishermen aren't here to see this.*

He glanced over his shoulder at the trail to the lake in hope of finding someone with whom to share his small triumph, but the path was empty except for a foraging ground squirrel. *Damned stay-in-bed sissies,* he muttered as he removed the fish, clipped it onto his stringer and deposited it in the cold lake with the Rainbows that he had caught earlier.

The first hour after dawn was Doug's. He always arose in the dark, stumbling around the camper making his coffee as Hazel grumbled, "Do you *have* to be so noisy?" He'd

reach the lake just as daylight began to sweep the mists from its surface. Other fishermen would start straggling down the trail later, after the sun had eased the early morning chill.

Doug's numbed fingertips probed the jar of salmon eggs as he re-baited his hook. Although his grubby gloves gave some protection against the cold, the tips of the fingers had been cut off to aid him in the precise work of baiting hooks and tying lines — lessening their effectiveness against the weather.

He groped for a cigarette from a crumpled package and lit it before casting his line into the glassy water and settling back in his folding chair to contemplate, for perhaps the thousandth time, the majesty of the snow-capped Sierra across the water, repeated in every perfect detail on the lake's mirror surface. He had to admit that having this beautiful place to himself was worth braving the shivery dawn.

Uncle Doug lived for trout season. Winter was just a dull period between fishing seasons that he endured only by hibernating in front of the television, watching whatever sporting event might be on. As soon as the mountain passes were free of snow, he and Aunt Hazel set out for their favorite lakes.

In 60 years of fishing he had eliminated the aspects that didn't appeal to him — trolling from a boat he found dull, stream fishing was too rigorous, and fly-casting too showoffy. Angling from the lake shore was his game. He was the first on the shore at daylight and the last to leave at sunset.

When he had caught his limit, he might trudge back to the camper for a sandwich and more coffee. He always returned to the lake, though, to watch what was being caught and to help anyone who could use his expertise.

Uncle Doug especially loved helping children improve their fishing skills. He would show them special ways to tie line, give generously of his favorite weights and singers, and would often improvise a pole holder for a pint-sized angler by whittling a point on the end of a forked branch and sticking into the sand.

He was a stumpy, gnarled man with faded blue eyes forever squinting from behind his glasses. He wore a stained hat to protect his eyes from the sun, but the damage of years of exposure was plain to see in the pattern of small scars where the skin cancers had been removed, as well as on the lips which (in spite of sun-screening protection) were blistered all summer long. His false teeth had never fit properly, so his speech was a bit hesitant and he mumbled as though he had a speech impediment.

At one time Uncle Doug had been quite a beer drinker, but he now rationed himself to one or two a day during fishing hours. His kidneys were not quite what they once were, he had found himself taking too much time away from fishing for trips to the toilet.

As he pulled in another fish, he could hear sounds of awakening from the nearby campground. Dogs were barking, children calling and boats beginning to rev up — all sounding too loud in the quiet, thin mountain air. The gray smell of smoke from early campfires encircled him, mixed with it the hearty fragrance of coffee and bacon.

"Hi, Doug," a small voice called

out. It was Mike, a ten-year-old whom Doug had been tutoring at fishing. "Hey!" Mike exclaimed, examining Doug's stringer. "You got a Brown."

"Yep," Doug acknowledged. "Got him on salmon eggs."

"Look, Dad," Mike called over his shoulder to his father, who had followed him down the path, "Doug caught a German Brown."

This bit of information brought several other newcomers to Doug's spot on the rocky beach. All listened eagerly to the details of the catch, hoping they might enjoy the same luck.

Hazel, having awakened and completed her minor housekeeping chores at the camper, joined the group gathered around her husband. "Shall I take your fish back and clean them?" she asked, her eyes sparkling with a small, secret joke.

"No," said Doug (who always avoided cleaning fish if at all possible), "I'll clean these and then come up for breakfast."

"Okay," Hazel answered. "I'll fix a fresh pot of coffee, then." She headed back to camp as Doug carried his catch to the fish-cleaning shed—where there would doubtless be another small audience to appreciate his prized Brown trout.

Wish he'd get a Brown every day, she chuckled to herself. *If he did, I'd sure be cleaning a lot less fish.*

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Smoke Your Own!

Does the mere thought of smoked trout find you drooling with anticipation? With a little effort, you can build a smoker and smoke your own fish.

by Geeta Dardick

It's easier than you think to give your fish that delicious taste of the woods. Your dream of a ready supply of smoked trout can easily be a reality if you build yourself a smoker and follow some basic instructions.

The smoking of fish hasn't changed much in the last century—or for that matter, since man's earliest history. The only proper fuels for smoking are still hardwoods such as hickory, oak, beech, maple, pecan, sweet bay, alder, manzanita, buttonwood, apple, cherry, pear and other fruit wood. Never use soft woods or wood of trees with needles such as pine, cedar or fir. Their resinous smoke will give fish a bad flavor.

If you don't have a handy source of hardwoods, you can purchase hardwood chips or sawdust to use in your smoker. In fact, even if you do have a good source of wood, you will use sawdust or wood chips, rather than bigger pieces. You can even use dried corn cobs. Remember, you are looking for smoke, not fire.

Start your fire and let it burn down to embers, then put on the chips or sawdust to make smoke. If you dampen the sawdust, it will smoke more. You can also squirt the fire with water from a bottle to get it to smoke.

When you hang up your fish, don't let them touch each other or the sides of the smoker. One handy trick is to insert wooden toothpicks into each fish to keep them from hitting each other.

Temperature Control

Whatever type of smokehouse you build, you will need to install a thermometer to keep track of the temperature. The sensor should be on the inside of the smokehouse, with the recording information visible from the outside.

A smoker is really just a very slow oven that can give off smoke along with heat. You can cold-smoke (at 80 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit) which really doesn't cook the meat, but imparts a smoked flavor—or you can hot-smoke the fish, cooking it as it receives its smoked flavor. Hot-smoked trout won't keep as long as cold-smoked, but both have a delicious taste.

As a general rule of thumb, you'll want to keep the draft open in the early stages of the smoking process, driving air past the fish and thus eliminating excess moisture that could interfere with the drying process.

You want this moisture out before the real smoking process can begin. Therefore, don't pack the smoker too tightly, or over its capacity. This would put too much moisture-producing fish in too small a space.

At the end of the smoking period, you'll want less air movement in order to retain some moisture, so that the fish doesn't shrink too much. You can experiment with flavors and speed in your smoker to get the effects that you desire.

Preparing Trout for Smoking Hot-Smoked Trout

To make hot-smoked trout, split the trout up the back, leaving it in one piece with the belly intact. After thoroughly cleaning the fish (you may leave the head on if you like), soak the fish in a salt brine (one-half cup salt dissolved in each quart of water) for 30 minutes to remove the blood from the flesh.

Dissolve two and one-half pounds salt in one gallon of water. Add one pound sugar, two tablespoons crushed peppercorns and a handful of crushed bay leaves to this brine. (You can experiment with adding other spices as well.) Soak the trout in the brine solution for two to four hours, depending on how salty and cured you like your fish to taste. Afterwards, you must rinse the fish well and dry them in open air or with an electric fan for about three hours before putting them in the smokehouse. You can tell when they are dry enough because a thin shiny coating will form on the surface.

Smoke the fish for eight hours at a temperature under 90 degrees F. Build up a dense smoke without increasing the heat and smoke for four hours longer. Then increase the fire until the temperature is around 150 degrees F and smoke for a final two or three hours, until the fish has a

glossy, browned surface. Cool for several hours before wrapping each fish separately for storage.

Cold-Smoked Trout

You probably won't want to cold-smoke whole trout, as the process can take as long as five days, and someone has to keep watching the fire! It's quicker to cold-smoke filets. Cover the filets with salt brine for two hours, drain, rinse, and then air dry for two more hours. Hang them over oiled dowels in the smokehouse. Smoke lightly for four hours at under 90 degrees F. Turn filets and smoke four hours longer. Then smother the fire so that it makes a very thick smoke and smoke for some six more hours, turning several times, until the filets are a deep golden color. Cool and wrap separately and store in a cool, dry place.

A Variation: After removing the head, split the fish in half. Wash it and trim the edges then soak the fish for an hour in salt brine. Drain. For 40 pounds of fish, mix four pounds salt, two pounds brown sugar, four tablespoons white pepper, and two ounces each of crushed bay leaves, allspice and cloves. Dip the fish into the spice mixture and rub well to work the flavors into the flesh. Pack spiced fish in a tub and weight them down. After about 12 hours, remove fish from the cure and rinse well. Attach fish to hangers and let air dry for six hours before hanging in the smokehouse. Smoke lightly for eight hours at about 90 degrees F, then build up a dense smoke and continue to some for 70 degrees F for a day or two. Cool the fish for several hours, brush with oil and store.

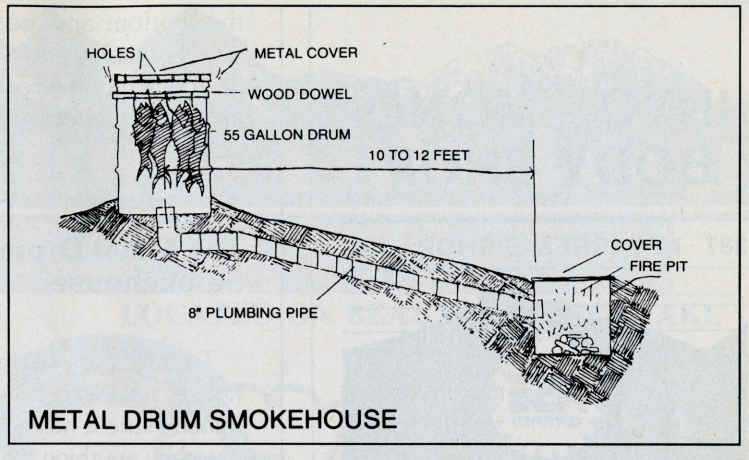
Storing Smoked Trout

It is impossible to predict how long you can keep your fish after it is smoked. Cold-smoked fish will definitely keep longer than hot-smoked—but to keep fish for an extended period of time, you would need to cold smoke it for a week or two. For a longer storage time, it was once popular to add saltpeter to the brines, but this nitrate preservative is no longer considered safe for the health. Better to eat your smoked trout fairly soon and enjoy it! Whatever fish you don't eat immediately should be stored in a cool, dry place.

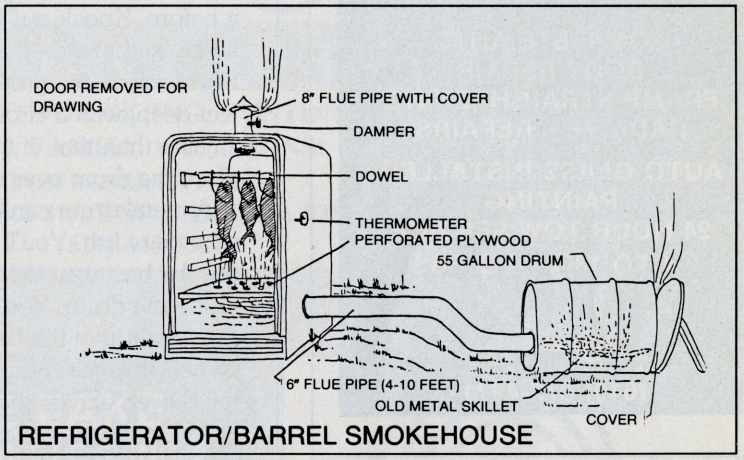
Adapted from HOME BUTCHERING AND MEAT PRESERVATION by Greeta Dardick, © 1986, Tab Books, Inc., Blue Ridge Summit, PA.

Building Your Own Smoker

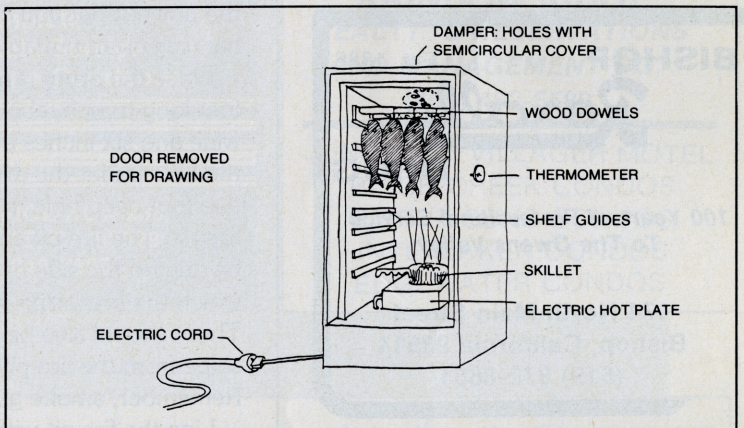
There are four simple smokehouses that you can build without much trouble—the metal drum, the refrigerator/barrel, the refrigerator/hot plate, and the shed. While the shed is the only real "house" in the group, all four designs provide the elements necessary for smoking fish: a source of smoke, a place to contain the smoke, a method of holding the fish in the smoke, and draft dampers near



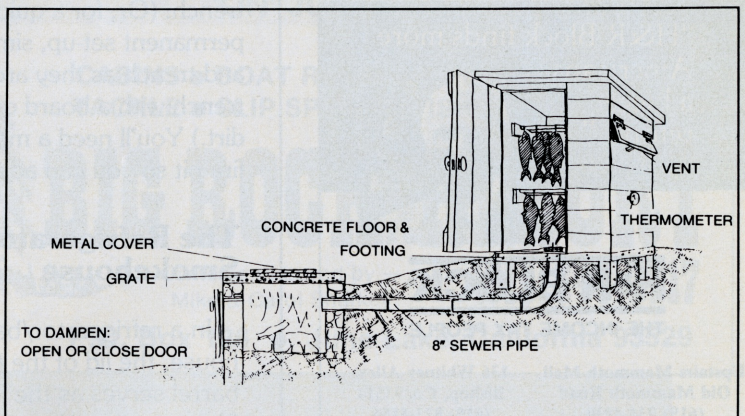
METAL DRUM SMOKEHOUSE



REFRIGERATOR/BARREL SMOKEHOUSE



REFRIGERATOR/HOT PLATE SMOKEHOUSE



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the bottom and near the top. You'll probably find that you already have much of the required equipment for these smokehouses around your yard.

The Metal Drum Smokehouse

To build a metal drum smokehouse, start with a 55-gallon drum, making sure it has not been contaminated by anything that was stored in it before. Knock out both ends and find a lid that will cover the top end. Dig a hole in the ground about two feet deep, with a circumference smaller than that of the drum and place the drum over the hole.

A metal drum can hold about 20 pounds of fish. You'll need to figure out the best way to hang your trout inside the drum. You can drill holes near the top of the barrel and run dowels through them or simply run the dowels across the top of the drum. In the latter case, you'll have an airspace left when the lid rests on the dowels, but you can fill that by hanging clean burlap over the top.

Once the drum is finished, dig a 12-foot-long trench, about six inches wide and six inches deep connecting the hole under the drum with another two-foot-deep hole, which will be your fire pit. The fire pit and trench should be dug on the side of the drum from which the prevailing winds come. There should also be a slight uphill slope from the fire pit to the drum. Remember, smoke goes up!

Line the fire pit with fire bricks and run a six-inch plumbing pipe down the trench. (Or, for a quicker but less permanent set-up, simply leave the pit and trench as they are, and cover the trench with a board covered with dirt.) You'll need a metal cover for the fire pit so you can adjust the draft.

The Refrigerator/Barrel Smokehouse

In a refrigerator/barrel smokehouse, the lid of the (metal) trash barrel serves as the lower damper. Place the barrel on its side. Put sand in the barrel/fire chamber and use an old skillet to build the fire in, setting it on the sand. Cut a six-inch hole in the lower side of an old refrigerator.

Place the barrel slightly below the level of the refrigerator smoker and four to ten feet away, allowing the smoke to rise and connect the refrigerator to the barrel by a six-inch stovepipe. The smoke will enter the bottom of the refrigerator and rise upward.

You can place a perforated plywood shelf (full of one-half inch to three-quarter inch holes) lightly above the entry hole for the smoke. The shelf will help spread the smoke evenly through the chamber. Install a stove pipe with a damper and cap—just like that on a wood stove—in the top of the refrigerator for the smoke to escape. You'll want to put screens at the smoke entrance and exit points to keep out insects.

The Refrigerator/Hot Plate Smokehouse

The refrigerator/hot plate smokehouse is an indoor design that departs a bit from pioneer tradition in that it uses electricity.

Take an old, broken refrigerator or freezer and remove the motor to make it lighter and easier to handle. Clean it out and put an electric hot plate on the bottom shelf. You can run the cord out a hole, or simply close the door on it. Put a sturdy metal pan on the hot plate to hold your wood chips.

You will also need to put in two sets of air holes with dampers: one in the side of the unit to draw in air and one on the top to let air out. You'll need to be able to regulate both dampers—fully open, half-open and closed. An ultra-simple venting system is to drill a circle of holes and cover them with sliding or rotating pieces of metal.

You can place your fish on the shelves that came with the refrigerator or screw holes into the top to hang the fish—or both. How much fish the smoker will hold depends on the size of the refrigerator or freezer used.

The Shed Smokehouse

Many people associate smoking with traditional smokehouses and you, too, might want to consider building a more traditional shed. While it is more costly, and more permanent than the other types, it is identical in principal.

You'll want to start with a brick or stone fireplace slightly downhill of the house-to-be and on the side from which the prevailing wind blows. Always, remember that you want the smoke to travel uphill into your smokehouse.

Your permanent firepit should have a front door that can be opened and closed. You'll feed your wood, chips and sawdust into the pit through this door, which can also serve as a draft controller.

Connect the firepit to the shed area by a six-inch sewer pipe which should come up into the smokehouse in the center of its concrete floor. You'll want the pipe in place (complete with bug screen) before you make your pour.

You can make do with a mud floor, but concrete is much better for both sturdiness and cleanliness. To control settling of the concrete, pour the floor on top of four concrete footings, set below the frost line in cold climates.

You can build your shed six feet high and four feet square, or even smaller. It can be a simple two-by-four stud structure with a hinged door at the front covered with wood or other siding. Nail notched two-by-fours horizontally along the sides to hold up the sticks from which the fish will hang. Near the roof on one side, install a hinged vent with a handle. You'll want to be able to operate the vent from the outside of the building. The vent should also have a fly screen.

Geeta Dardick and husband Sam are homesteaders who raise organic vegetables, fruits and meats on their 35 acres of land near San Juan, California. Geeta's book "Home Butchering and Meat Preservation" was a main selection for the How-To Book club.

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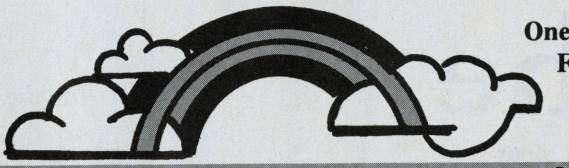

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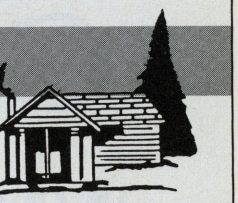

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The Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel

The mountain and the squirrel
Had a quarrel,
And the former called the latter "Little prig";
Bun replied,
"You are doubtless very big;
But all sorts of things and weather
Must be taken together
To make up a year,
And a sphere,
And I think it no disgrace,
To occupy my place.
If I'm not so large as you,
You are not so small as I,
And not half so spry;
I'll not deny you make
A very pretty squirrel track.
Talents differ; all is well and wisely put;
If I cannot carry forests on my back,
Neither can you crack a nut."

From The Mountain and the Squirrel
by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802-1882)

Text and Photos by Mike McWherter

There are few of us who have not watched with amusement the antics of the golden-mantled ground squirrel. One fall afternoon while eating lunch on a large stump near Lake Mary I was greeted by a golden. He seemed to be as curious about me as I was about him. He was friendly in a sort of cautious way, apparently having encountered people before. I watched him circle the stump several times. His eyes were bright and alert. When I moved away from the stump to get a water bottle he fled in the opposite direction. Upon returning to the stump I discovered his interest in me. He had taken my place on the stump and was finishing my sandwich as fast as he could. His cheek pouches were bulging and this gave him the appearance of having a giant toothache (on both sides). Ordinarily the golden spends his day foraging for pine nuts, acorns, berries, flowers, and other mountain vegetation. With cheek pouches still full he rushed down the stump, scampered along the ground a short distance, and disappeared under a large rock covering his burrow, — and I recovered my sandwich.

The golden-mantled ground squirrel is a member of the Rodent order and displays the gnawing and burrowing characteristics for which this order is known. Like other rodents the golden has a pair of upper and lower front teeth or incisors which are like chisels. These teeth grow constantly during the golden's life, are very strong, and enable him to chew through materials as tough as nut shells, with nylon packs hardly even a challenge. Rodents are the largest order of mammals with perhaps twenty thousand species. This order not only includes the squirrel family but also other gnawing and burrowing creatures such as beavers, gophers, porcupines, and mice.

The word for the squirrel family is *Sciuridae* and it has an interesting origin. Although the golden lives at altitudes which generally are cool some of his relatives live in warmer areas of the world. In regions of the world where the midday heat was oppressive for much of the year naturalists of pre-Christian times noted that the squirrel had in his tail a ready-made parasol. Greeks called the little creature the *siuros*, from *skia* (shade) plus *ouva* (tail) or "shady tail". *Siuros* passed through Latin and entered English prior to the 14th century. The word had numerous spellings and was difficult to pronounce by peoples to the north. The golden lives in temperate regions of the world and is not particularly noted for his large tail. In fact his tail is relatively small and would not provide him with much shade at all. But the squirrel part of his name still means "shady-tail".

The squirrel family, *Sciuridae,* consists of over

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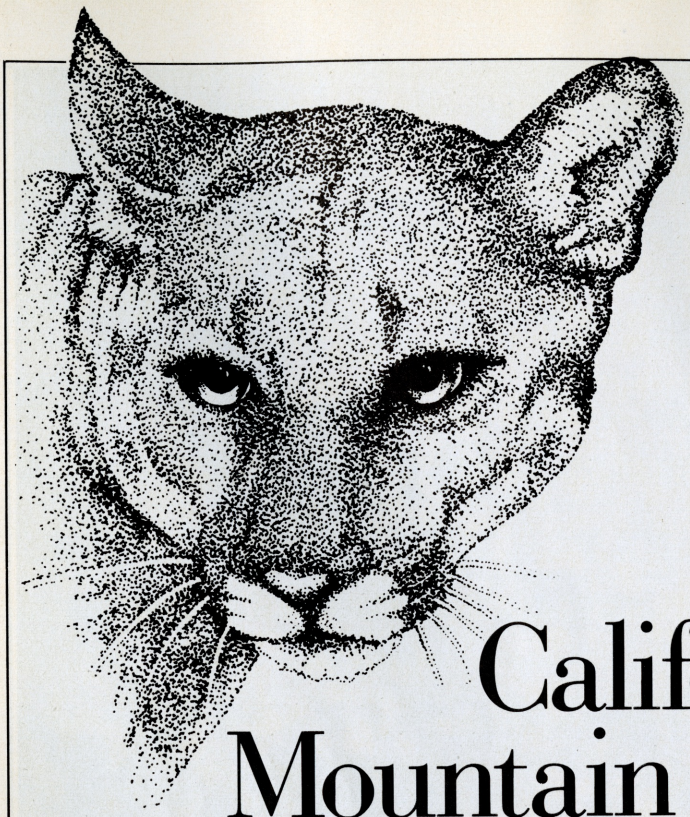


California Mountain Lion Under Fire

by Melissa Yank

Supporters of efforts to preserve the California Mountain Lion, one of the state's most majestic and least-understood creatures, have vowed that their fight is not over - even if the state's Fish and Game Commission votes, once again, to permit trophy hunting of the big cats. The action will probably take place following a public hearing set in Long Beach on April 8, the last in a series of three hearings held throughout the state.

Just two weeks after a court ruling last December stopped a previously approved trophy hunt, the Department of Fish and Game proposed a new 79-day season for 1988. The hunt, the first to take place in 16 years, would allow for the killing of 190 lions in central and northern California. This winter's round of hearings was scheduled to discuss the new proposal.

"We just won the suit to stop the hunt and the Commission is once again considering a season this year, based on the same insufficient report it presented last year," said Sharon Negri, director of the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation.

The short-lived victory in December was the result of a year-long battle between the Commission and the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation, formed in 1986 to help fund the Mountain Lion Coalition, a lobbying group established in 1984.

The mountain lion has been protected from trophy hunting by legislated moratoriums since the early 1970s. In 1985 the Foundation sponsored a bill that would have continued the expired moratorium. Passed by Legislature, it was vetoed by Governor George Deukmejian.

According to Bob Porec, a volunteer for the Foundation, the governor didn't see a reason to separate the mountain lion from other game mammals and give it a special bill for protection. He also felt the decision for a hunt fell under the Commission. Last year's proposal for the hunting season was permitted by the expiration of the moratorium.

On May 13, 1987, in the San Francisco Superior Court, the Foundation filed a lawsuit alleging that, in approving the hunt, the Commission had failed to do a

Continued on page 58

Continued from page 33

40 living genera of squirrels and countless species. The golden's scientific name *Spermophilus lateralis*, from its genus and species, translates: *spermo* = seed, *philus* = lover of, and *lateralis* = side. Put all this together with the knowledge that the golden has stripes on his side and likes eating seeds and you get "seed lover with stripes on his sides" which describes him fairly well. The golden has some relatives that are also "seed lovers". The Belding ground squirrel (*Specmophilus beldingi*) lives at the same elevation as the golden while the California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) lives at a lower elevation. Other genera of the squirrel family which live in the Sierra are the western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*), chickaree or Douglas Squirrel

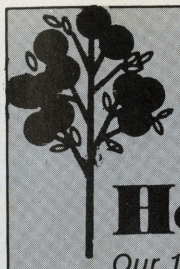
(*Tamiasciurus douglasii*), and the northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*). A group of squirrels that the golden is often confused with are the smaller chipmunks (*Eutamias ssp*) with eight species. In fact the golden has been called the "big chipmunk". The confusion arises because chipmunks also have striped sides. The difference is that the stripes of the golden stop at the shoulders and chipmunks are striped all the way to their noses. Three squirrels that most people don't realize are also members of the squirrel family are the marmot (*marmota flaviventris*), woodchuck (*marmota monax*), and prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*). The squirrel family is a large one and taken together they inhabit all the major land masses except Australia, the extreme polar regions, and such islands as Madagascar, New Zea-

land, New Guinea, and Hawaii.

Hibernation for the golden begins in September or October. It will have spent the summer gorging itself to build fat reserves. What the golden can't immediately eat will be stored away in little larder chambers within its burrow. Its winter sleep is heavy and hibernation lasts until about April. Snow still blankets the ground when the golden emerges. Since spring is slow to arrive in the high country, green food is scarce. The golden makes good use of the nuts and seeds it stored from the last summer. Soon after its spring emergence, mating takes place and in June or July a litter of four or five are born. The female gives birth to only one litter per year. Within a month the young are weaned and begin their plant diet and forays from the burrow. By early fall they will be fully on their own, building their own nests. They will have spent a summer putting on a layer of fat and gathering a spring larder. Instinctively they prepare for the approaching winter months.

If the golden (squirrel) senses that we humans are not interested in making it a meal it can become very friendly and entertaining.

Life is precarious for the golden. The mountain lion, black bear, fox, weasel, pine marten, bobcat, coyote, eagle, goshawk, or cooper's hawk would all find it a tasty addition to their diet. It is no wonder goldens are so alert. If the golden senses that we humans are not also interested in making it a meal it can become very friendly and entertaining. They are a joy to watch and a favorite of many people. The celebrated little creature of Emerson's poem may have been any one of the many varieties of squirrels — maybe even the golden.



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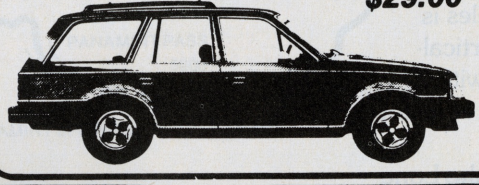

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BY STEVE BOGA

"In this part of California man is no more than a tenacious intruder. The desert draws some men almost irresistably by its challenging brutality, but when man is gone, the desert blithely erases his mark. Like the sea, but with more diversity, the desert bespeaks the mystic strength of unseen power."

— Neil Morgan, 1969

The desert—particularly Death Valley—has always held a powerful fascination for some. Since 1966 when a Frenchman trudged 102 miles around the valley for fun and adventure, it has bewitched sportsmen, tempting them to try the seemingly impossible. The Fifteenth Annual Death Valley to Mt. Whitney Bicycle Road Race, May 7-8, is a classic example of the seemingly impossible.

On the morning of May 7, about 300 hearty souls will start pedaling from Death Valley's Stovepipe Wells (sea level) and ride 78 miles to the Lone Pine Visitor Center (elevation 3,733′). On the morning of May 8, the race will resume in Lone Pine, with the course winding through the Alabama Hills, then up the alluvial fan of the Owens Valley, up switchbacks, 22 miles in all, to Whitney Portal, 8370′, which is both the end of the road and the trail head for the Mt. Whitney climb. Although the net elevation gain for the 100 miles is 8,370 feet, it's really a 2½ vertical-mile bicycle climb mixed in with nearly a mile of descent—in very hot weather.

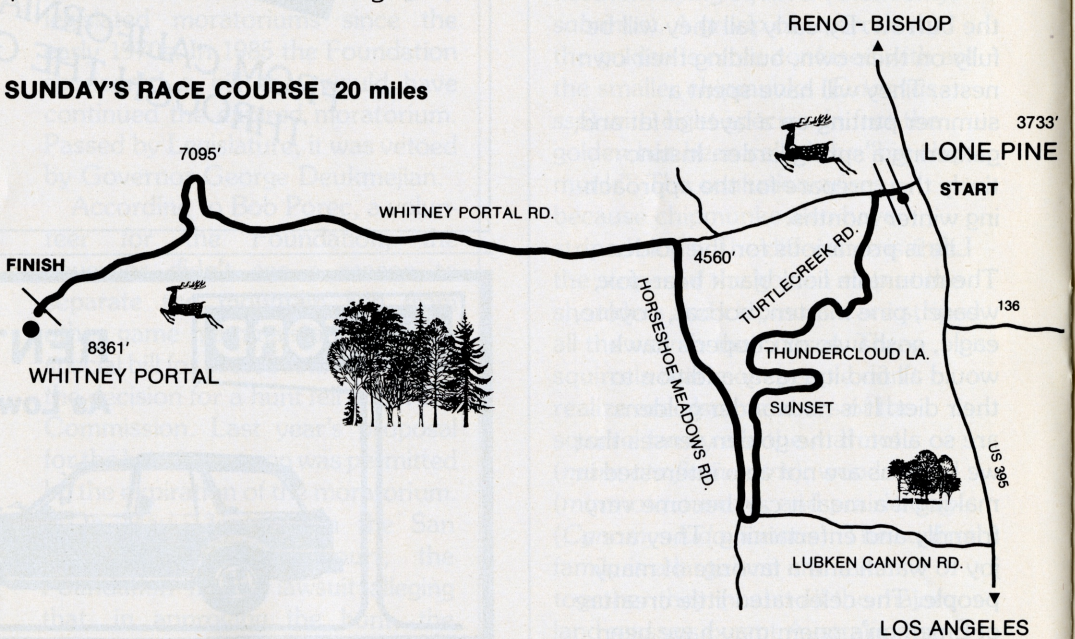
The race is promoted by the Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce, yet virtually all of the cyclists will come from out of the area. It will not be unusual, in fact, if only one of the competitors is a local Lone Piner. That would be Ben Jones, 55, who is the town doctor.

Jones has been the Lone Pine doctor, practicing what he calls "frontier medicine," for 25 years. He figures he'll probably be there another 25 years. He's known the area since he was a kid, when he used to ski and backpack around Mammoth. Then his uncle put a piece of land near Lone Pine up for sale, and Jones seized the opportunity and bought it. While he attended college at Pomona and medical school at UCLA, he would flee to Lone Pine at least once a month.

After graduation, fed up with smog and race riots, he looked into the Lone Pine medical scene, discovered that the town needed a doctor, and moved to the mountains for good. Though he was trained as an internist, his main interest has become family practice, and he does everything except surgery.

Although he'd always been active—"lots of skiing and motorcycling"—Dr. Jones didn't begin his aerobic career until the mid-seventies, when the country was still basking in the warm glow of Frank Shorter's Olympic victory and the running craze was at its height. Jones and a couple of friends ran in the 1st Annual Wild Wild West Cross Country Marathon, another Lone Pine event. "I was having back trouble and my orthopedist suggested running. It worked and now I run five miles each day and a marathon each month. I'm addicted to it. I'm afraid to stop."

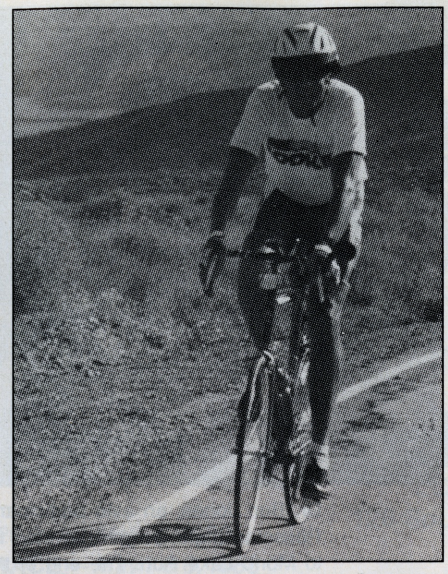
For most people—especially most 55-year-old men—stopping is not the



problem. Starting is the problem, usually an insuperable one. But Jones is an exercise machine that rarely breaks down, either physically or mentally. He has outstanding tendon strength and a world of patience. Give him some good company and he will run or ride (or even swim—he's done 5 triathlons) until he crosses the finish line, however long it takes. Though he often finishes last, he never quits. In the 1987 Wild Wild West Marathon, while the winning time was 3:05:16, Jones finished 5:29:02, last in his group of eight men in the 50-59 age bracket, and almost a half-hour behind Jack Rosa who was the lone member of the 70-79 age bracket. He did, however, finish well ahead of Libby Priscilla, who is in her sixties.

"I prefer to call these things 'runs' or 'rides' instead of 'races,' " he says. "They certainly are for me. I don't like to train alone, so I sign up for a lot of races. It gives me a little something to shoot for, and it means a day of getting good aerobic exercise without having to train."

Besides his 12 marathons a year,

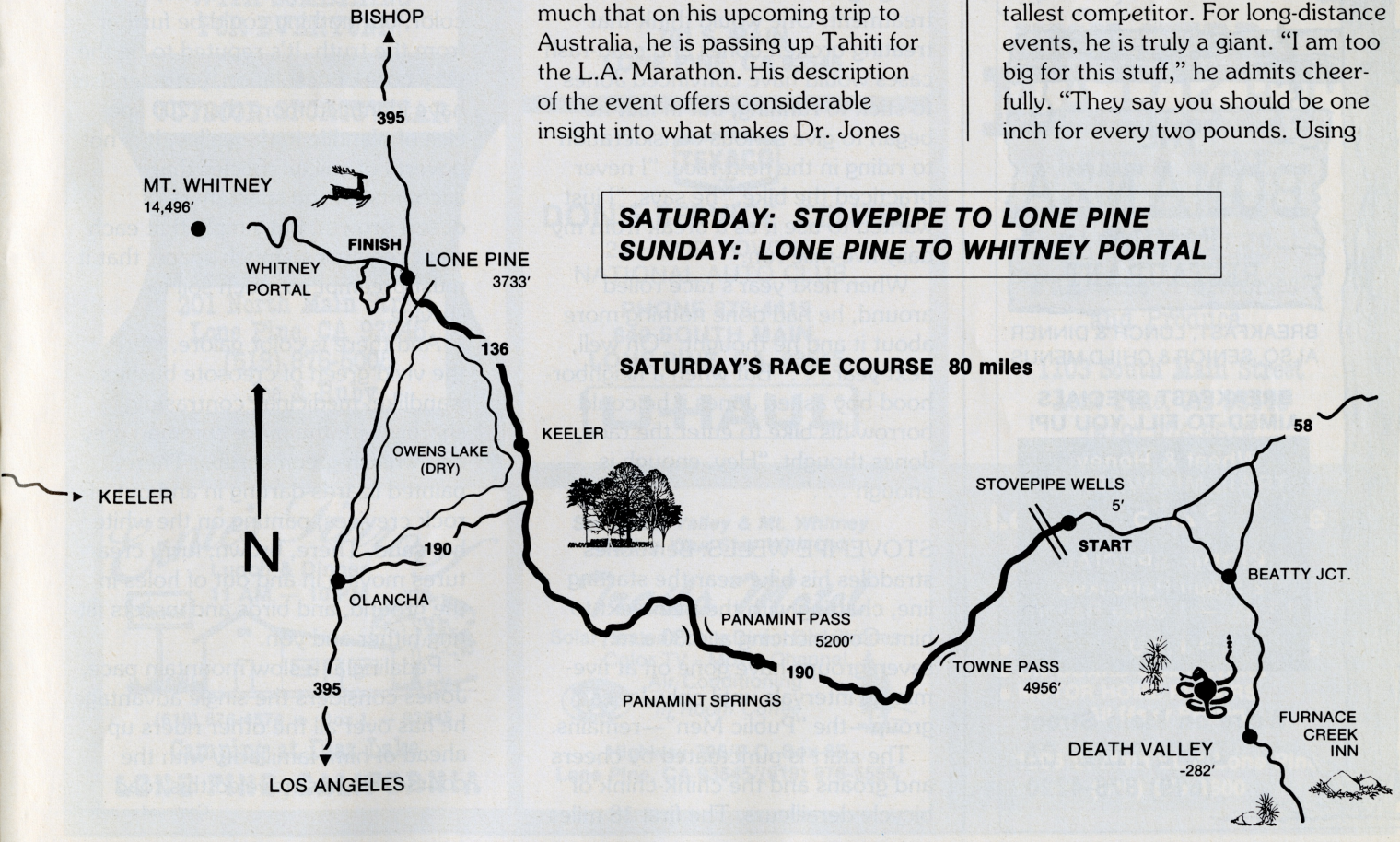


Dr. Ben Jones climbs Panamint Grade on the Death Valley to Mt. Whitney Race.

Jones participates in other assorted foot races, such as the Bay to Breakers (where he has thus far declined to dress up like a centipede or as part of the Royal Flush Sanitation Team, although he doesn't rule it out), and the grueling 20-kilometer road race from Lee Vining to 10,000-foot Tioga Pass.

His favorite run, however, is the Los Angeles Marathon. He likes it so much that on his upcoming trip to Australia, he is passing up Tahiti for the L.A. Marathon. His description of the event offers considerable insight into what makes Dr. Jones run/ride. "It's a 20,000-person moving party," he says, chuckling. "I love it. Last year I got passed by a guy with one leg, on a roller skate, using a ski pole. I yelled to him 'Go get 'em!' A little while later, I was running with a guy and he suddenly said, 'Look, a juggler.' I looked over and next to me there was a guy juggling three balls while he ran. He did the whole 26.2 miles doing that. . . ."

For Jones, endurance events are social occasions. Ask him why he puts up with the pain and discomfort and he will enthuse: "It's good for the cholesterol level and you meet such neat people!" To his way of thinking, there's nothing quite like settling into a rhythm near the back of the pack with someone worthy of a good chat, sharing a mile or two with him, then drifting on to someone else. He accepts a pace slow enough that his breath comes without gasps and he can talk freely. It's best when his companion is the same height, because then they are linked by a common stride and breathing rhythm that can be as inspirational as a drum beat. But Jones, at 6'5" and 185 pounds, is usually the tallest competitor. For long-distance events, he is truly a giant. "I am too big for this stuff," he admits cheerfully. "They say you should be one inch for every two pounds. Using



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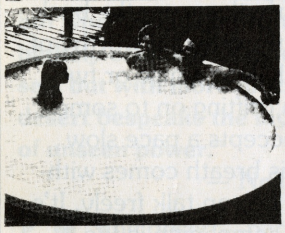

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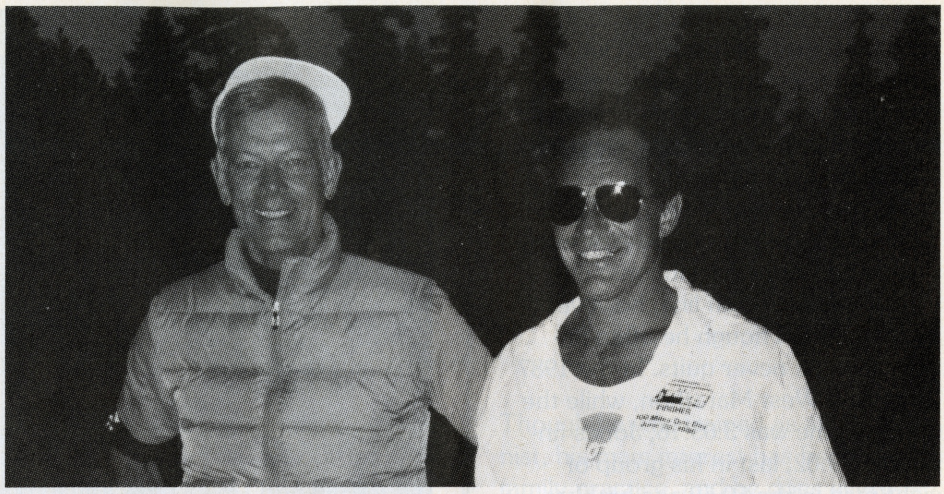

Dr. Ben Jones, an avid participant in long distance running, and Tony Rossman (right) prepare to start the last leg of the 100 mile Mammoth to Mono Lake Run. The end of this run coincides with the Mono Lake Bike-a-thon each year.

that formula, I should weigh 154 pounds. Like the Kenyan runners."

It's odd that Jones heard about the Death Valley to Mt. Whitney Bicycle Road Race the way he did. Although Lone Pine is a small town (pop. 2200) and gossip is, in the words of Chamber of Commerce Manager Mary Sinclair, "our favorite sport," the race didn't reach his conscious level until race officials started bringing accident victims to him for treatment. One would think that treating broken bones and road-rash cases would have convinced Jones to stick to running, but in fact he began to give serious consideration to riding in the next race. "I never practiced the bike," he says, "I just wanted to use it as a break from my daily five-mile run."

When next year's race rolled around, he had done nothing more about it and he thought, "Oh well, next year . . ." But when a neighborhood boy asked Jones if he could borrow his bike to enter the race, Jones thought, "Hey, enough is enough . . ."

STOVEPIPE WELLS: Ben Jones straddles his bike near the starting line, chatting with the man next to him. Commencing at 6:30 a.m., seven groups have gone off at five-minute intervals until only Jones' group—the "Public Men"—remains.

The start is punctuated by cheers and groans and the chink-chink of bicycle derailleurs. The first 18 miles of the ride is an arduous 5,000-foot climb to the top of Townes Pass. Jones, sweat pouring down his face and back within the first mile, falls to the rear of the pack of 40 men, content, with a sort of tortoise mentality, to gear down and travel 7-8 miles per hour.

At that speed, he has time to grimly admire the desert fauna and flora. It's a prevalent myth that Death Valley is devoid of life, of color, but nothing could be further from the truth. It's reputed to be the very core of desolation, yet scientists have identified more than 200 species of plantlife in the valley. It is not poverty of soil or species that accounts for the sparseness of desert growth, but simply that each plant requires so much space, that it must preempt so much soil to survive.

And there is color galore. Here, the vivid green of creosote bushes, wandlike, medicinal, contrasting sharply with the more common grey and whitish-green shrubs. There, painted lizards darting in and out of rock crevices, panting on the white hot sand. There, brown, furry creatures moving in and out of holes in the ground, and birds and insects flitting hither and yon.

Pedaling at a slow mountain pace, Jones considers the single advantage he has over all the other riders up ahead of him: familiarity with the course. He has traveled this road

Continued on page 40

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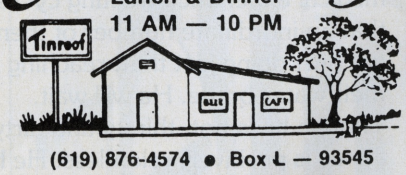

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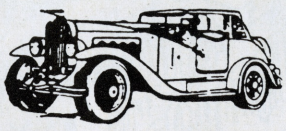

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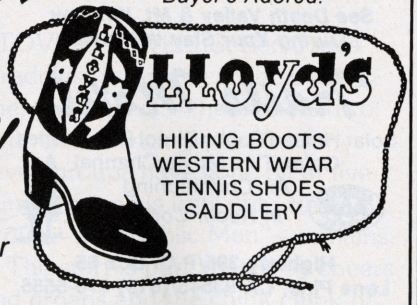

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more than 300 times, for he has a second office at Furnace Creek and drives his '29 Model A there every two weeks. He knows every rock slide, every turn; what he doesn't know is how that's going to help him.

Panting and sweating, Jones reaches the saddle of 4,956′ Townes Pass and starts down the other side, a 10-mile, 3,000-foot drop into the rainbow-colored Panamint Valley, during which, in Jones' words, "If you don't watch out, you'll find yourself doing 60 mph." Jones would just as soon not do sixty (tales of riders hitting animals and shredding multiple layers of skin are legion among bicyclists), but by now the temperature approaches 100 degrees and he is unable to use his brakes very much for fear of heating his rims and melting his tires. If that weren't enough, he must also fight severe cross winds that threaten to buffet him right off the road.

Malevolently, the wind changes directions so that now it is blowing hard from the northwest, from the dried-up lake bed of Owens Lake, brining with it a stinging spray of sand and dust that coats the throat and attacks bare skin like needle points. Alone now, Jones bends low over his handlebars and grittily pushes on.

Down into the Panamint Valley and up the western side, climbing once more to 5,000 feet, to the plateau separating the Panamint Valley and the Owens Valley. The wind has abated and it has grown hotter. With the sun high in the sky and the course again in the ascent mode, Jones is sweating more than ever. He realizes he must drink lots of water; but as he reaches down for his water bottle, he has a rush of dizziness, that makes him wobble and nearly fall. He recalls from his medical experience treating cyclists that an inordinate number of them got hurt doing just that, reaching for their water bottle. He will wait. Though he is hot, thirsty and dirty, Jones is positively relentless. He has banished doubt—he knows he will finish. Still, he should have practiced his cycling a bit more.

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The Misadventurer

by Steve Boga

Rick Sylvester stood on the rim of El Capitan, looking out over Yosemite Valley and pondering his fate. Far below, 3200 feet below, lay a brown winter meadow. Sylvester stared at that meadow with particular interest, for it was to be his landing target. Nine hundred feet from the base of El Capitan, beyond a grove of pine trees. A realistic goal, he thought,

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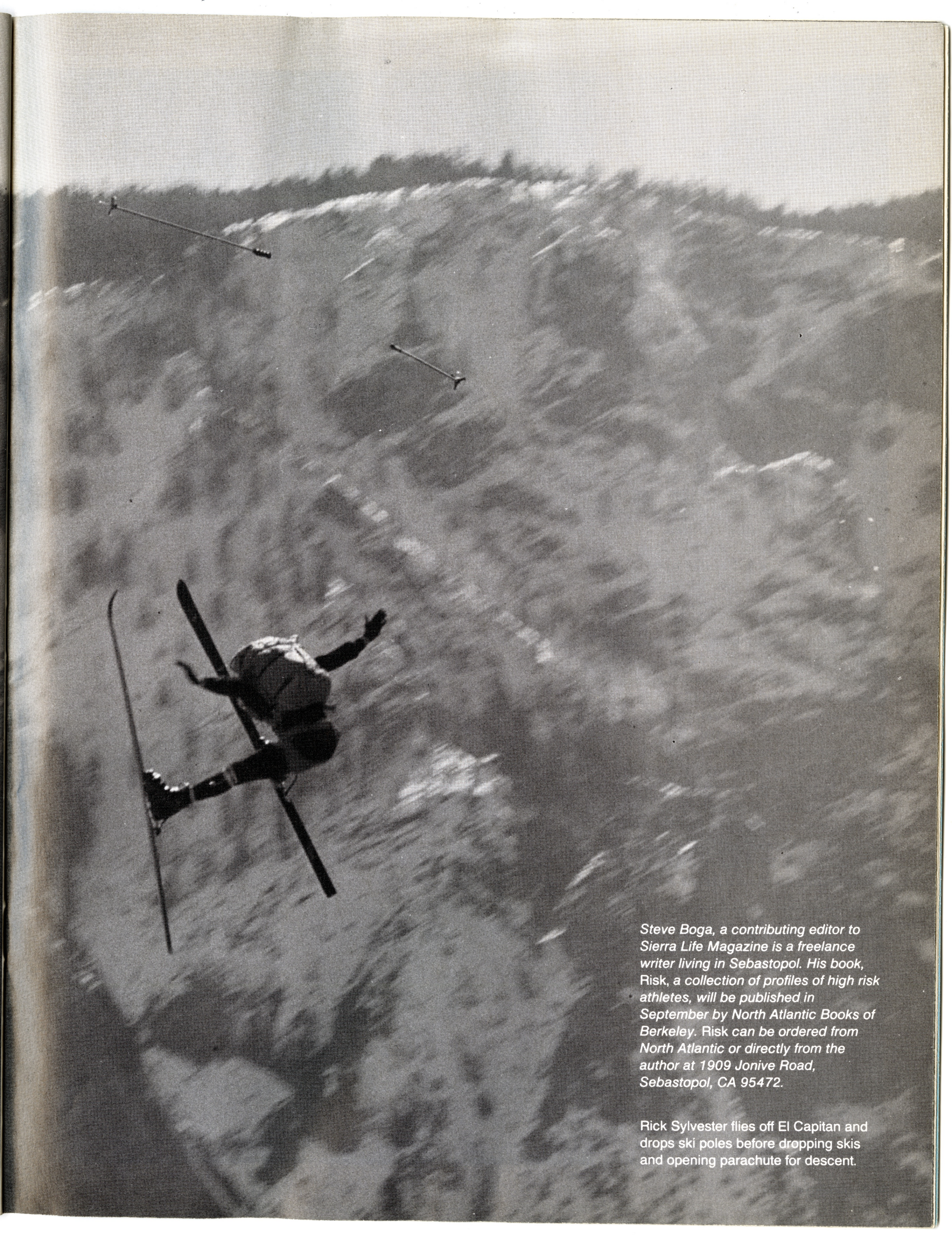
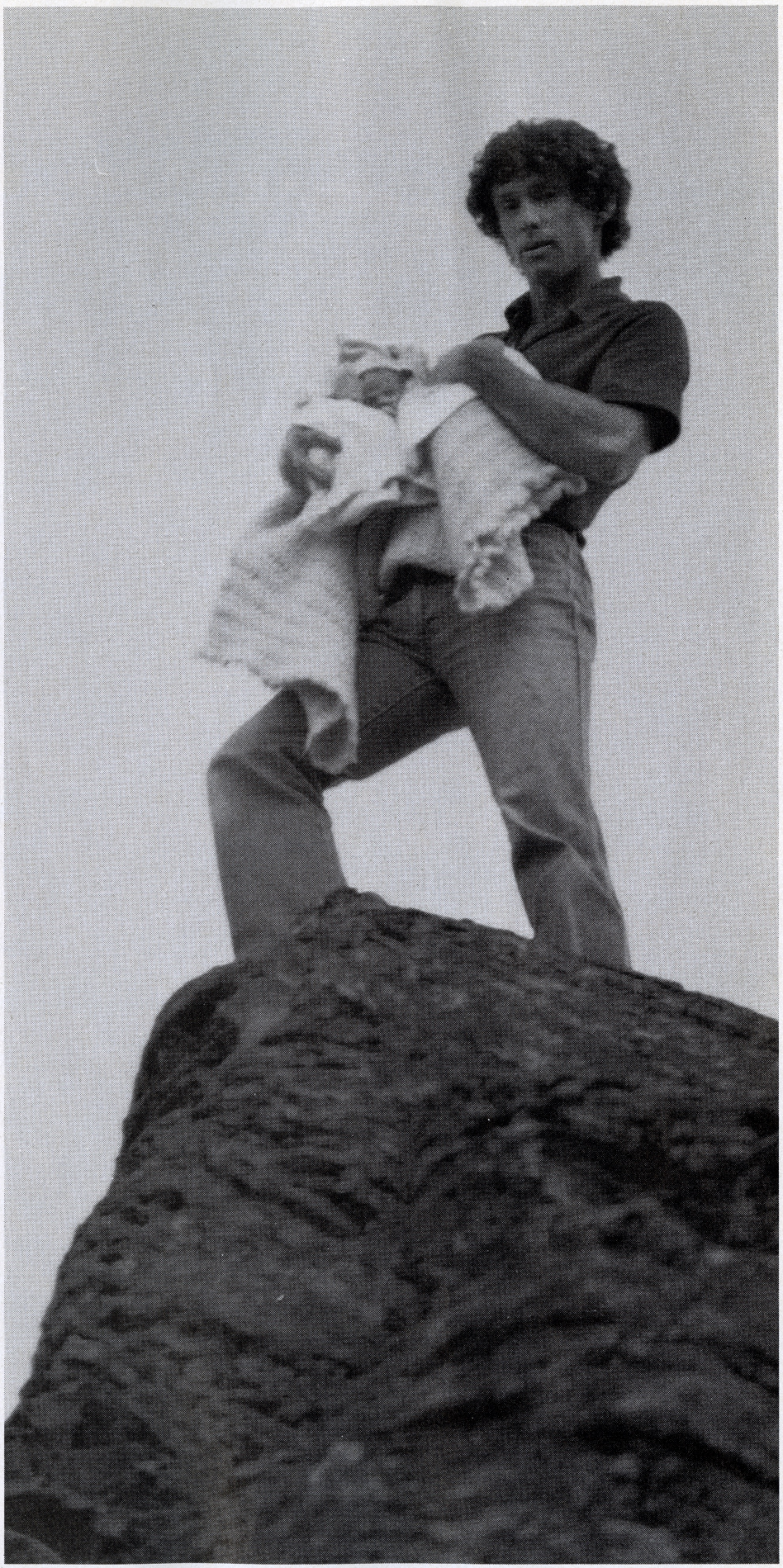


Steve Boga, a contributing editor to Sierra Life Magazine is a freelance writer living in Sebastopol. His book, Risk, *a collection of profiles of high risk athletes, will be published in September by North Atlantic Books of Berkeley.* Risk *can be ordered from North Atlantic or directly from the author at 1909 Jonive Road, Sebastopol, CA 95472.*

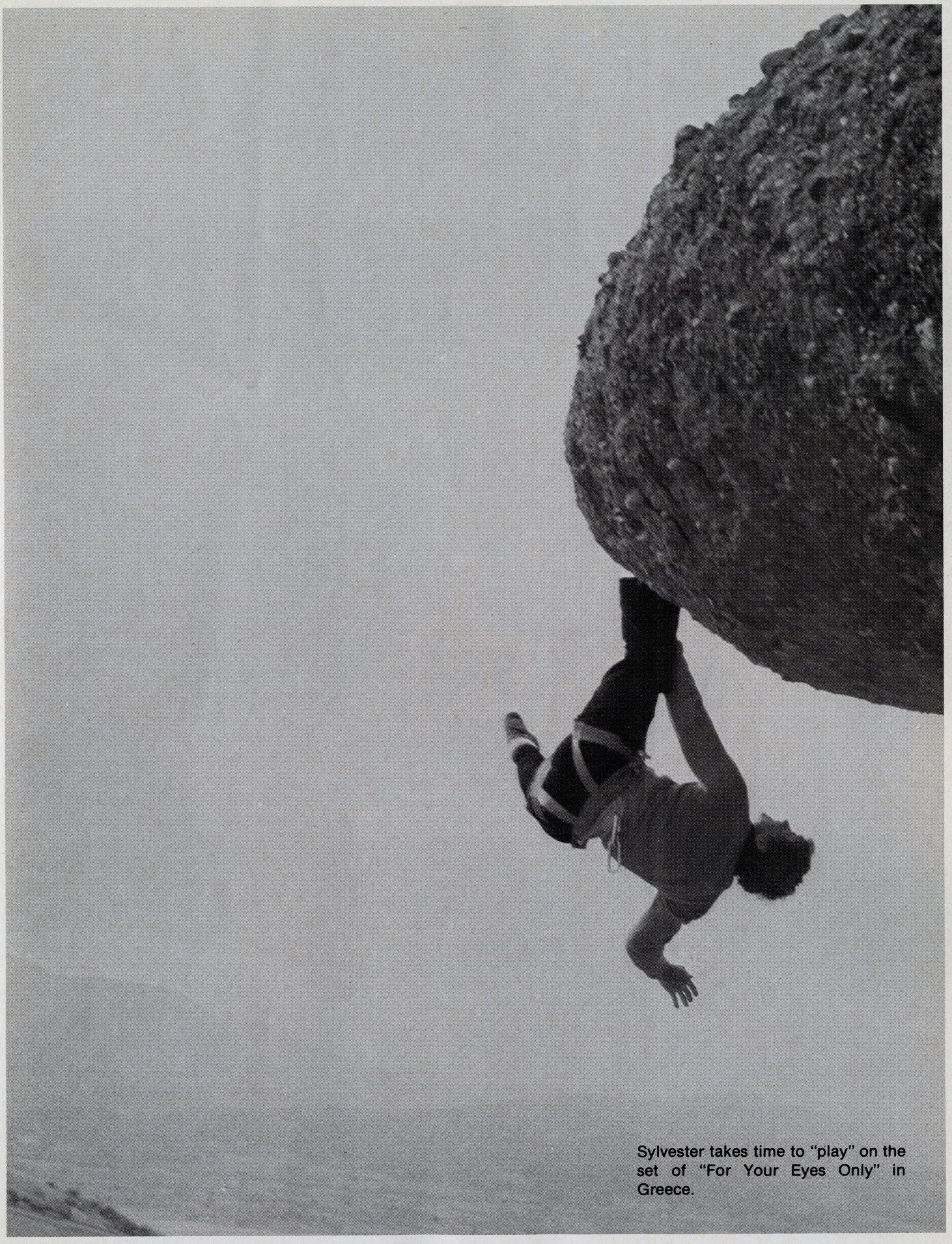
Rick Sylvester flies off El Capitan and drops ski poles before dropping skis and opening parachute for descent.

but watch out for those trees. He tried to recall that quickie last-minute lecture on tree-landing procedures, something about trying to hook the chute over the top of the tree, something about covering the chin and groin areas . . . ah hell, he'd make the meadow. He had nothing if not spirit.

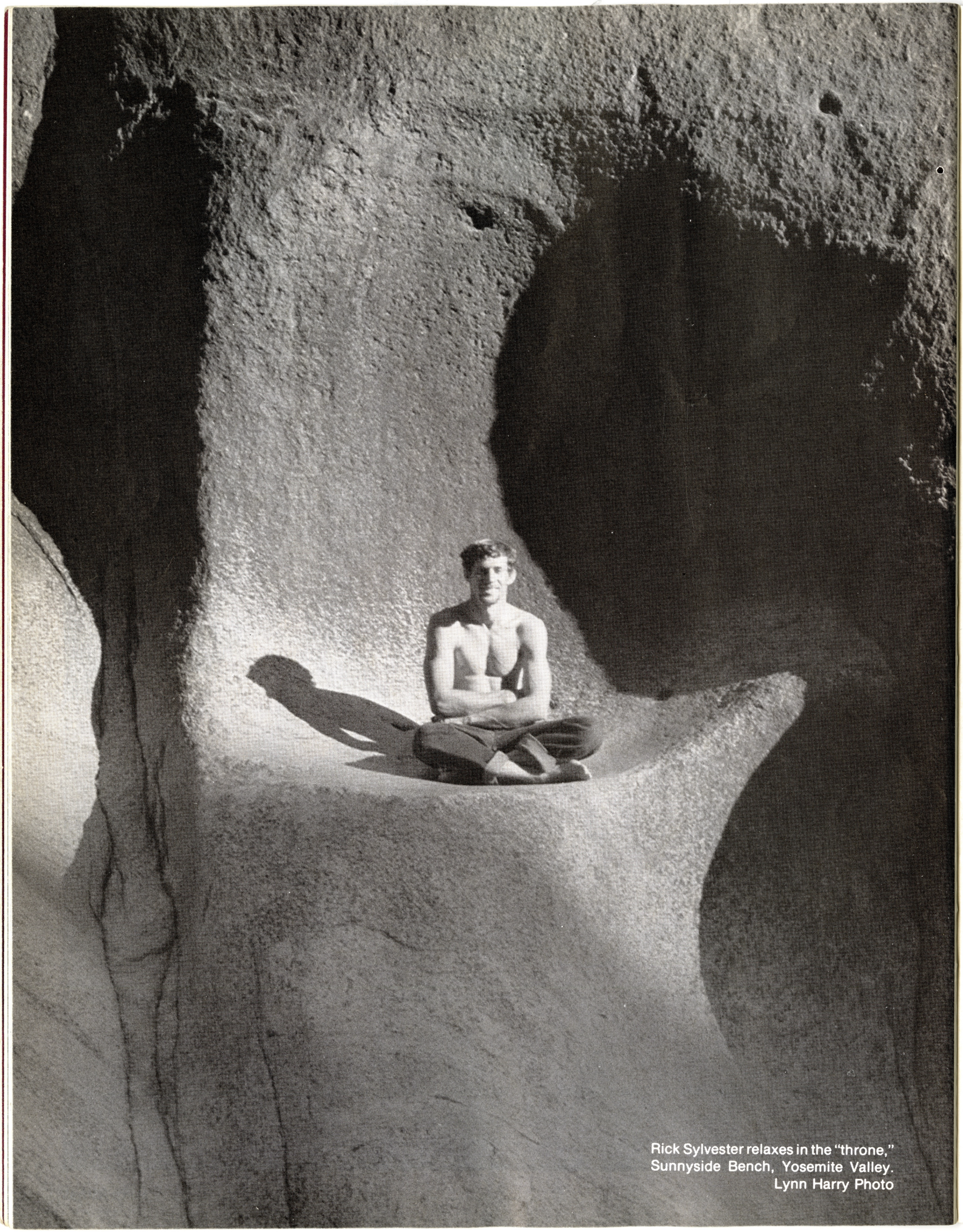
He ski-stamped the snow for the hundredth time, smoothing imaginary blemishes on the run. It was cosmetic surgery, for the run had been laboriously packed and sculpted into the wee hours by himself and his support crew. Most people imagined the top of El Capitan to be smooth and flat, but it was far from that. The pitted granite, littered with bushes and branches, offered no natural ski run. It had taken many man-hours to provide that. The Jump simply wouldn't have been possible without the aid and comfort of friends and crew. Load-bearers, ski-run packers, camera people — most doing more than one job — he hoped he wouldn't disappoint them all by dying. He stood up, wondering: Who is the patron saint of parachute-skiing? Or should it be ski-parachuting? Paraskiing? Oh, what did it matter? It didn't figure to be as mainstream a sport as baseball . . .



Sylvester takes daughter, Cheyenne, on her first summit on the way home from the hospital...She is 26 hours old.



Sylvester takes time to "play" on the set of "For Your Eyes Only" in Greece.



Rick Sylvester relaxes in the "throne,"
Sunnyside Bench, Yosemite Valley.
Lynn Harry Photo

or even midget wrestling. It was a virgin sport—until now.

It had come to him during a sleepless night. A preposterous idea: Be the first to ski off El Capitan, the largest monolithic piece of granite in the world. Two months later he added the parachute, creating a realistic stunt—at least in his eyes. To the others who didn't see it that way and asked "Why?" he replied, "Because I thought of it."

Obstacles arose, the first and most glaring of which was that Sylvester has never sky dived in his life. "However," he says, "it's always been on my list of things to learn."

He learned. Two weeks of lessons at the Antioch airport, during which he made an incredible 53 jumps. "It was really a crash course," he says, "no pun intended. Stepping out of a plane at 2800 feet has to be the most unnatural thing in the world. I won't even try to describe that first jump, but just imagine all your moments of truth multiplied together."

Near the end of the training, Sylvester began to practice maneuvers that might be specifically applicable to El Capitan. He attached two-by-fours to his feet with ski bindings mounted on them to simulate the ski release. He intentionally left the plane as awkwardly as possible, upside down, tumbling, spinning, to see how quickly he could right himself. As he explains, "Who knew in what position I'd find myself flopping over the side of El Cap?"

"When you talk about adventure," Sylvester continues, expounding on a topic close to his heart, "one of the concomitants has to be 'the unknown'. And there were a lot of unknowns with the Jump: What about the updrafts? Would I get away from the wall? And after I chucked the skis, what would happen to them?

"My original idea had been to jump and immediately open the chute. But after talking to an acquaintance who jumped out of a plane with skis on—'a nightmare of balance,' he called it—I abandoned

"If you Space Ski Mount Asgard.. before you hit the ground, hit the silk!"
"Those treacherous winds and the death-defying drop down the mountain's sheer granite face were enough to strike me as nervous as a fried egg on a hot skillet.
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Sylvester has appeared in movies and magazine advertisements.

that idea. After all, one of the main functions of the jumpsuit is to cover any protrusions which could conceivably catch on the deploying canopy, and what greater protrusion than a pair of 215 centimeter skis?"

Balancing his skis on his shoulder, Sylvester began a slow walk towards the top of the ski run looking like a condemned man on his last mile. Although neither a highly religious nor superstitious man, he found himself ruminating on the miraculous. A Russian lieutenant fell 22,000 feet and lived . . . A Yugoslavian stewardess dropped 31,000 feet in the tail section of an exploded airliner and made it . . . If the chute doesn't open, will I make it? Will I be in that elite group? That one in a million? Just then a tiny voice spoke up: "Don't count on it."

He thought of the two guys who had leaped from the top of El Cap with parachutes on their backs. Failing to get away from the wall, they banged against it all the way down, badly bruising themselves and leaving one with a permanent limp when he landed awkwardly in a scree field at El Cap's base. But hell, they'd broad jumped it, plus they'd ignored the prevailing advice and jumped in the afternoon when the updrafts were unfavorable. He would get away from the wall . . .

In parachute school, he practiced "tracking", a body position in free fall in which the arms are held next to the sides, as in ski jumping. In tracking, also known as Delta position, the jumper accelerates from 120 to 160 miles per hour, all the while adding horizontal distance to his vertical descent. And to reach that meadow, Sylvester needed at least 900 feet of horizontal distance.

He thought of Miura—"The Man Who Skied Down Everest," and the only other skier Sylvester knew of who ever employed a parachute. (Actually there was another, but fortunately Sylvester was unaware of him. A Norweigian had skied off a Dolomite cliff but died against a ledge 600 feet down before he could pull the rip cord.) Sylvester decided that his stunt was scarier than Miura's. He had skied down a lot of mountains, including much of Mt. McKinley, and always felt that he was still a part of the earth. And when he jumped out of a plane, he had already divorced himself from the earth. But coming down the ski run, he would be very much a part of it, with no real sense of the terrible abyss, then suddenly—!

There were other problems, too. He had the Jump divided into three phases:

(1) The Ski—700 feet of slightly inclined ski-packed snow. Here he might fall and lose speed and not get out away from the wall, or knock himself out, or separate a shoulder and not be able to pull the rip cord. True, he'd skied for years—both downhill and cross country—but seldom with a 40 pound parachute on his back. "With that load, I couldn't ski well in the egg or tuck position," he says. "I figured on the one hand, the faster I skied the further from the wall I'd get. But on the other hand, the greater my chance of falling and dribbling over the side. As with all things in life, it'd be a compromise."

(2) The Fall—3200 feet, about half of it free fall, as it turned out. Once

Sylvester takes a break with Roger (James Bond) Moore on the set of "For Your Eyes Only."

away from the wall, he had to chuck the skis (where would they go?) and open the chute at the proper time. A mistake anywhere could mean disaster.

(3) The Landing—ideally in the meadow. If not . . .?

There was little in Rick Sylvester's early background that augured a future in adventurism. Born in Brooklyn in 1942, his family moved to Southern California when he was three. His father was an attorney who, among his other pursuits, got into building tract homes after World War II. He happened to be building them in Anaheim when Disneyland went up, with the result that Mr. Sylvester made, in Rick's words, "an obscene amount of money."

The three kids went to Beverly Hills High School, where they hobnobbed with the sons and daughters of the rich and famous. "You always have those names to toss around if you want them," he says. Glenn Ford was my scoutmaster—a nice man. And I went to school with Danny Thomas' kids, Groucho's daughter. Leo Durocher lived across the street . . ."

Although Sylvester was an accomplished collegiate wrestler, most of his early plaudits were for intellectual achievements. An honor student, he graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1965 with a double major: Sociology and Scandanavian Literature and Language. Seeking to prolong his studies, he applied to the Institute for English Speaking Students in Stockholm. He was accepted, and he and his wife Rhoda journeyed abroad.

"I'd always been a student," he explains. "I was reluctant to have academic life come to an end. But sitting in a sterile library horing over books on Swedish social order, about the world's most boring subject, at least to me, while outside (my first time abroad) ten feet in every direction everything seemed new and exotic. I sensed the end of my academic career.

Before he'd left Berkeley, Rick had found a brochure for the Swiss International School of Modern Mountaineering. It was founded and operated by a world-famous climber, John Harlin, the "Blond God", as he was known in climbing circles. During his time in Stockholm, Sylvester exchanged a few letters with Harlin. "It was mostly over a financial matter," he says. "The school was $100 a week, which was a lot of money to me. I was living on about $1000 a year—getting a little help from my family—but I knew I was going to that climbing school. To seem less selfish, at least in my own eyes, I signed my wife up too. But I had a gut feeling she'd drop out after the first day, and I wanted to find out if I'd get that other $100 back. But then Harlin was killed climbing on the North Face of the Eiger—he fell 4000 feet when his rope broke—the money didn't seem so important. It was a sobering introduction. I thought, if this can happen to one of the greatest climbers in the world, what's in store for me?"

Rick and Rhoda arrived at the climbing school in Leysin, Switzerland, which had been taken over by Harlin's climbing partners, Dougal Haskin and Don Whilans, world class climbers themselves. As Rick predicted, his wife dropped out after the first day; but he stayed on, even signing up for a second week when typically bad alpine weather washed out several days of the first week-long course.

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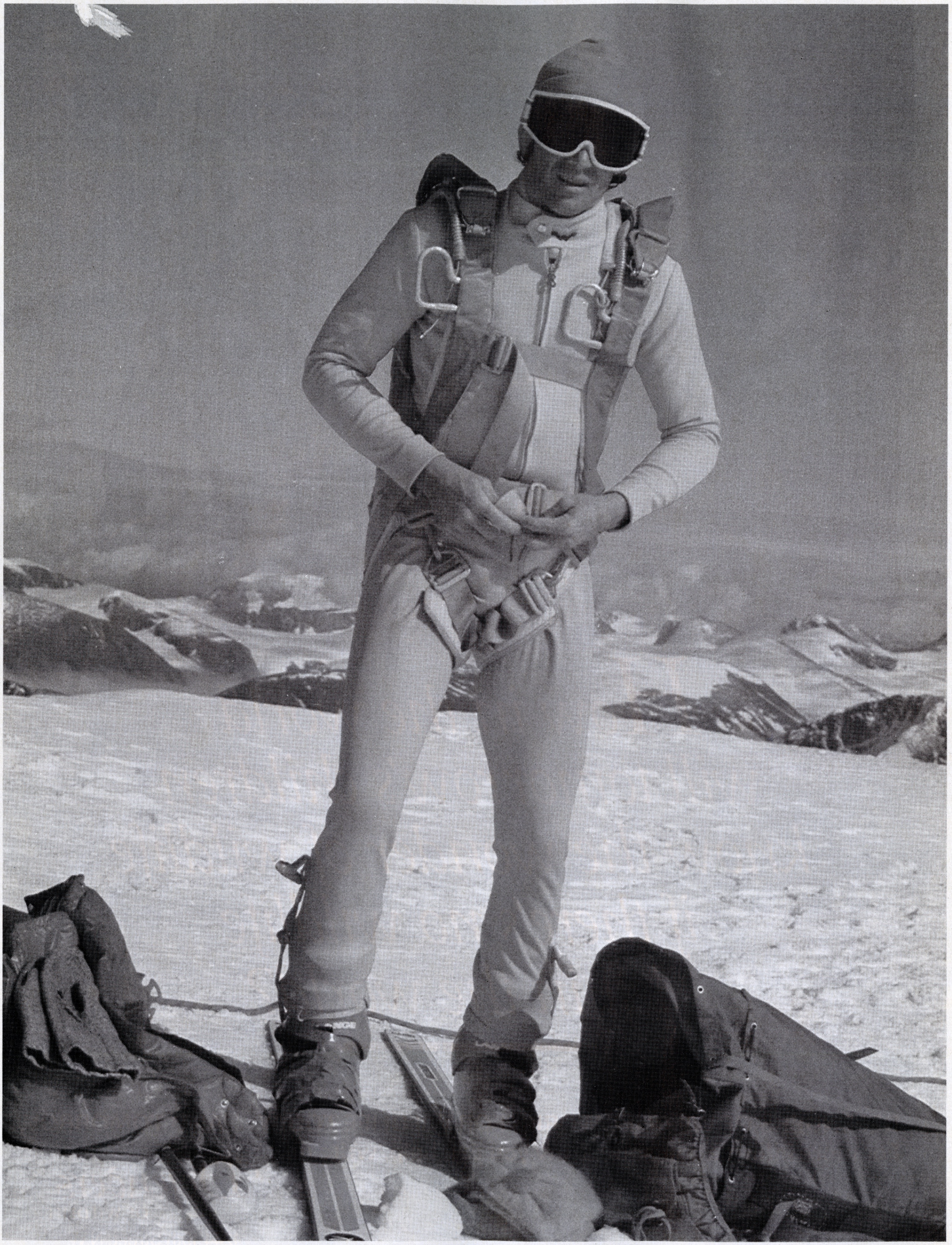

Now Rhoda began to get really annoyed. "She was not overly adventurous," Sylvester says. "An athletic event for her was driving a stick shift. She was anxious to get back out on the tourist trail, to get onto RomeParisLondon."

Ironically, it was Rhoda who helped Rick get his first big climbing opportunity. He explains: "My wife came up to our room near the end of that second week and said that Layton Kor (who had been on the Eiger when Harlin was killed) was downstairs looking for a climbing partner. She thought he meant for the day, but he wanted to go to the Dolomites in Northern Italy for a week or so, and he knew I had a car—that was a big deal. Climbers are always looking for partners. My first four climbing partners were Don Whilans, Dougal Haston, Yvon Chouinard and Layton Kor—four of the best in the world. That's like going out to play baseball for the first time with Pete Rose.

"So we gathered up Rhoda and Layton's French girlfriend, and the four of us set off for the Dolomites. I remember seeing a sign at one point: "VENICE—86 KILOMETERS". Oh, Rhoda's eyes lit up. Venice! It is Mecca to the sightseer. But I was driving, and I guess right there I made the choice between my marriage and climbing. We did not go to Venice."

Climbing with Layton Kor, Sylvester was not an immediate popular success. "It was a true baptism by fire," he says. "I couldn't do the first pitch, couldn't even get off the ground doing the first moves of the first pitch of the first climb we tried. For six days he dragged me up some tough climbs, always leading, always keeping the rope taut, which was demeaning and no fun. But on the last day, doing our hardest route, I could feel I was getting it a bit." Sylvester brandishes a fist. "I yelled to him to slack up on the rope and let me climb, but he wouldn't do it." After a reflective pause, he adds,

Sylvester makes final preparations for ski jump in a scene from "For Your Eyes Only."

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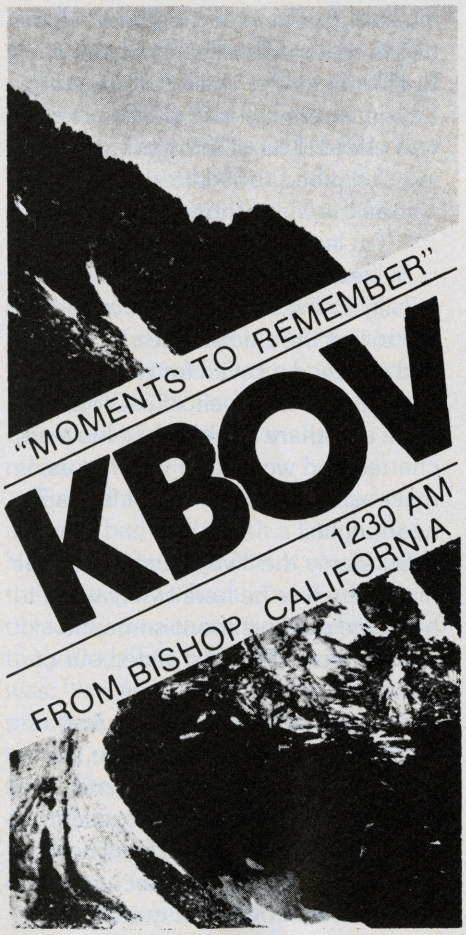

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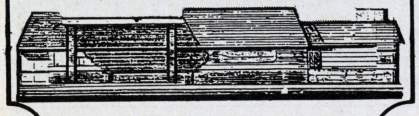

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"Even though in the beginning I was nearly catatonic with fear, deep down I knew the climbing life was for me."

At the end of that week, Rick rendezvoused with a fellow ISMM student and he and Rick and Rhoda drove off to find the Matterhorn. "Now, as a technical climb, many of the Matterhorn routes are not that difficult," Sylvester explains. "Story has it that a four-year-old girl and a ninety-year-old man have done it, and four Swiss guides tried to push a cow to the top. But it's not a stroll through a meadow and we were still novice climbers. Timing was critical: We had to get started at first light, which we didn't do; then my partner lagged behind, until finally he said he was turning back. I kept on, and suddenly realized that I was soloing the Matterhorn! With my late start, the guides coming down the mountain were all screaming at me in German to turn around. One tried to physically restrain me. But I made it to the top and most of the way back down before darkness forced me to bivouac on the mountain. No sleeping bag. And one of those cold alpine nights that made sleep impossible. But the next day when I returned to Leysin where my wife was staying, I was elated. I burst in on her, screaming, 'I climbed the Matterhorn! I soloed the Matterhorn!

" 'I'm leaving you,' she said."

Sylvester's boots crunched rhythmically in the snow as he moved to the top of the ski run. He stopped and watched a raven for a moment, admiring its silent, effortless flight. Here and there members of his team chatted and worked. It was not as quiet as usual on the top of El Cap, he thought.

Suddenly the "why" jumped out at him. Why was he here? Why wasn't he home reading about someone else doing it? The bird glided out of sight; the questions brought answers. The Jump was a logical extension of all that he'd done, he decided. He'd climbed the vertical walls of the rock four times, spent close to a month's time dangling from its sides. Here was a chance to reverse it and be much quicker about it. He continued walking, thinking of his favorite graffiti: "A person can live intensely only at the cost of one's soul."

Sylvester's journey from married student to single climber had dramatic impact. "Suddenly I was introduced to a new way of life," he says. "With its own special mountain bohemian subculture. I've never left it. As a result, my life has become qualitatively better. Instead of fifty weeks a year in the city and two in the mountains, I've reversed it."

He moved to Squaw Valley, where the skiing is good but the living isn't always easy. He answered an ad in Summit Magazine: "Climbers Wanted for Ski Patrol in Alpine Meadows."

Sylvester, shaking his head, says, "It seemed like no one had ever wanted climbers for anything before, but this guy knew that compared to climbing, ski patrol work is trivial. He knew that climbers who could ski would do the job well. I only got $1.44 an hour, but I got to stay in the mountains." He went to Yosemite and became part of that first wave of climbers who spent an entire season in the Valley. "Camp 4 was the climber's campground," Sylvester says, dreamily. "Before I went to Yosemite, I had a view of climbers as the last romantic heroes. But living at Camp 4 was disillusioning. There was shoplifting from the village store. The higher-ups in the Curry Company and some of the rangers hated the climbers. When I first got there, my friends warned me not to wear my climbing boots to the store; it was a dead giveaway.

"So much of what I've done relates to that group of people I got involved with in Yosemite. It was one of those great periods—like Paris in the Twenties—only instead of it being artistic, it was an age of creative physical self-expression. It was always: Be the first, the highest, the furthest. Standards were pushed. The Jump was just a logical extension of it all."

For the next few years, Sylvester went on an adventure spree. Constantly improving, he made increasingly difficult climbs, including four

different routes of El Capitan. During one memorable ten day climb, in which Rick led all the way, he and his partner ran out of food and water 2 1/2 days before the top. In explanation, Sylvester is characteristically blase. "We thought it would take five days," he says, shrugging. "They say you'll die in three days without water, but it's not true. In our case we were doing strenuous work and made it. It's one of those things: If you believe you'll die, then you will."

Over the years, Sylvester climbed many of the classic routes in the Alps, including the dreaded Eiger. He was one of six Americans invited by the Soviets to climb 24,590 foot Pik Communism in a mountaineering exchange program. He has climbed and skied down most of the major volcanoes in the western United States, and was the first American to ski down from the 20,320 foot summit of Alaska's Mt. McKinley—a 20-mile run that dropped 14,000 feet.

But not all of Sylvester's adventures proceed smoothly. One time he set off to ski the John Muir Trail, all 211 snow-covered, up-n-down miles of it, using—of all things—alpine skis. The locked-in heel bindings made it rough going. As one of Sylvester's friends says, "The expedition was grossly misplanned, but then, that's Rick. He has a way of turning an adventure into an epic—that's a borderline disaster in which everything turns out all right in the end." Starting near Mt. Whitney with a heavy pack, he soloed for 16 days and 140 miles. Says Sylvester, "I'm not as driven as some people might think. I'd stay in my sleeping bag until it warmed up, wouldn't get started till noon, then quit at dusk. In 16 days, the only sign of human life I saw were jets overhead." Finally, with the snow turned slushy and the conversation turned stale, Sylvester exited with the usual misgivings about his failure. He neglected to inform his friends that he'd cashed in early, and while they fretted over his safety, he was recuperating at his parents' house in Beverly Hills. "It's all part of a misadventure label that follows me" he says. "For example, I've had more than one climbing partner hit by lightning . . ."

Sylvester reached the top of the ski run and began to collect himself. He was glad that he wasn't starting from the topmost point of El Cap, a low-angled granite dome a few hundred feet further back. He'd rejected that as a potential starting point when a crew member calculated that he'd be skiing at about 90 mph when he reached the edge. He'd leave that sort of thing to Steve McKinney.

When he picked up his helmet, some of the airmail stickers he'd plastered on it came loose and blew off in the wind. Insufficient saliva to wet the glue. Yes, he was a little nervous. He drank from a water bottle and thought how far they'd come . . .

Suddenly the helicopter fired up and took to the air. A deafening whap-whap-whap that made him wince. Then panic. "I'm not ready yet," he cried into the din. "It's too early. I'm not prepared."

Sylvester checked his bindings, then the cords running beneath his pant legs that would release his skis (where would they go?). He checked and secured his boots, skis, helmet, gloves and poles, but the damn helicopter made it hard to concentrate and he worried that he was forgetting something. Fully geared, he stood at the top of the run with racing heart and mind. He went over every possibility: What about updrafts? What if he slipped and dribbled over the side? Or left a yellow trail of snow behind? Didn't pop the chute in time? Or knocked himself out? Or blacked out? The chute didn't open? He didn't make the meadow?

Then an old worry reared up again. It had to do with a line in the Yosemite National Park's regulations that says, "It is illegal to deliver an object by parachute from the rim to the valley floor." The legal question was: "Is a human an object?" The practical question was: "Will there be fifty rangers waiting on the valley floor to collect the evidence?" He and the crew had maintained a low profile, but that damn helicopter was enough to wake the dead.

Finally Sylvester ran out of delays.

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He quickly downed a half-bottle of beer, a small toast to the adventure, then adjusted his goggles, took a deep breath and signalled that he was ready. His crew signalled back. As he pushed off with a couple of skating steps, he wondered, was that really the signal? Maybe the cameras weren't ready. No, he must put that away. The film must rank behind the adventure. It's time to think about survival.

With a whoosh, Sylvester roared down the run. He reached the lip (estimated speed 50-60 mph), dropped his poles and soared out into space on the ultimate ski jump. He easily cleared the wall, but at too steep an upward angle. Suddenly he was spun around like a child's pinwheel. Five quick somersaults dizzied him. Desperately, he tried to rally his senses . . .

Pull the cords, release the skis—they're off! Get stable, stomach to the earth, arch the back. Now tracking to get distance away from the wall, hands next to the sides. Christ! There's El Cap Towers, halfway down, maybe eight more seconds to earth! Pull! A soft jerk and the plummet becomes a glide. Whew! The valley floor stops rushing to meet him. Or he it. But now the meadow looks too far off. Where to land? An 80-foot pine tree looks wrong but inevitable. . . . snagged! Hung up amidst tangled chute cords and brittle branches. Too far to jump, but the tree is slender and a bearhug gets him to the ground with only a small scratch on the finger.

Today, Rick Sylvester lives in a moderately-sized mountain home in Squaw Valley with his second wife, Betsy, and their two children. The general decor is of a Sesame Street motif—children's toys and drawings, coloring books—but there is an adult flavor to the abundant clutter, too. Dishes piled high in the sink, stacks of newspapers and books ("Who has time?"), magazines ("We subscribe to a dozen and a half—it can get out of hand.") and records ("Neither the TV nor the record player gets used much."). Above the staircase is a poster-size blowup of the Jump, with Sylvester in mid-tumble. Under the garage is Rick's "shop," which is filled with dozens of pairs of skis and a jumble of climbing equipment, books, magazine clippings set out on the floor in an open-air filing system, and bags of old newspapers that Sylvester "hasn't gotten to yet."

Rick is 45 but looks ten years younger. At 5'6 1/2" and 135 pounds, he is wiry, with taut, well-developed muscles and a healthy rawboned look. His curly, disheveled hair rarely feels a comb. High in the cheekbones, his face seems to have been chiseled from rock. Perhaps it is life imitating art. "It's the nature of the climbing endeavor," Sylvester says. "The hard rock and ice wear away the outer layers until the kernel is exposed."

On this day, Sylvester has cross country ski raced and run five miles, yet he is in no mood to sit. He grabs a snow shovel and heads for the driveway. Shoveling a little, leaning a little, he speaks of the travail of filming the Jump. It seems that the camera crew atop El Cap, who was entrusted with the responsibility of capturing the event, were too afraid to stand near the edge even though they were roped in. Thus, as soon as Sylvester dropped below the lip of El Cap he disappeared from camera range.

Two weeks later, he jumped again. This time he made the meadow—a stand-up landing—and got some good footage, but the chief ranger reacted coldly to the second jump, regarding it as a personal affront.

Betsy and the kids come home; Rick puts away his shovel and accompanies them upstairs. Pointing to his three-year-old son, Terray (named after the classic French alpinist Lionel Terray), Rick says proudly, "He's been on skis since he was two. I think he's a natural. I think he's going to be great." Meanwhile, he's a great kid, bright and charming, as is his older sister, Cheyenne. They and their mother seem like ballast, adding stability to Rick's life, lest it spin out of orbit.

Betsy begins to fix dinner, the kids go off to play and Rick settles in at the dining room table, surrounded

by papers and books. He speaks of still another facet of Rick Sylvester: The Runner. The man has completed a phenomenal 110 marathons in seven or so years of running. "I collect them," he says, "like some climbers collect peaks. I usually do one every three or four weeks. Yeah, I know what they say about only running 2-3 a year, but that's for the guys down around 2:10. I'm around three hours (80% of my marathons have been sub 3 hours), and it doesn't take me long to recover."

Even in marathoning, an element of misadventure exists. One weekend, Sylvester drove the six hours from Squaw Valley to Salinas for a marathon, arriving, as is his habit, seconds before the starting time. Unfortunately, he arrived not at the start, but at the finish, and the Salinas Marathon did not get crossed off his list.

In constant physical and intellectual motion, he packs more adventure into two days than most people do in a lifetime. In one weekend, he ran a marathon in less than three hours, drove most of the night to begin carrying skis up 10,457-foot Mt. Lassen before dawn, summitted the peak, skied down the 4,000 vertical foot descent of Lassen's north face, then the next day ran a double Dipsea race, arriving back at his Squaw Valley home Sunday night for a cameo appearance as husband.

And just what makes Rick run? And climb? And ski? "It all stems from an attitude," he explains. "If you believe Eric Erickson's theories on personality formation, it was probably engendered in me by the time I was three, although there sure wasn't any encouragement from my parents. I went against the grain there." Sylvester pauses, reflects, then says with remarkable candor, "Maybe the whole thing is nothing more than the small man's complex run amuck. Maybe I'm just compensating for all those years of being the smallest kid in my gym class."

It goes beyond that, of course, as Sylvester freely admits. "I guess I'm just an experience junkie. I'm afraid of missing something."

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Henry Smith

The Painter Who Came in From the Cold

by Martha Freeman

When Henry Smith was a young man he loved to paint the wintertime forest vistas of his native Canada. For a watercolorist the freezing temperatures, dropping as low as 20-below, present certain challenges. How do you keep your paints—and yourself—from freezing?

"I used alcohol in my paint water—and to drink. The effect on my work was rather interesting," he recalls. "As I worked, the painting would become a sheet of ice. When I'd put it in the car and start home, it would thaw, creating a lovely soft feeling that I probably couldn't have gotten any other way."

While landscapes remain Smith's favorite subjects, these days he prefers painting in the comfort of his Cedar Ridge studio, in the hills above Sonora. When he visits Yosemite, the Owens Valley or Sonora Pass, for example, he'll take numerous photographs, returning with them to his studio. The photos will serve as a point of reference as he works on his paintings, rather than as images to be slavishly copied.

"Artists who work exclusively from photographs never really sit down and look at nature—never get a real feeling for it. If you want to get a feeling for a subject and communicate its mood, you have to sit down with it for a while."

Smith, who has been drawing since he was five, became serious about art in high school when his teachers caught him sketching his classmates and, recognizing his talent, suggested he go to art school.

His fascination with landscape has recently expanded to include western scenes. He and his wife, Janet, recently spent a few days on the Honeywell Ranch near Bridgeport, riding with the cowboys who still round up their cattle and drive them out of the high country each spring and getting a feeling for the life they lead. "I've started painting horses since we moved up here," he notes. "They're part of the environment. I also like painting things that are reminiscent of the past—old buildings, for instance. But I paint them as they exist; I don't romanticize them."

Trained at two prestigious art institutes in Hamilton, Ontario, before moving to San Francisco in 1963, Smith spent 20 years designing outdoor lighting for projects such as the Golden Gate Bridge. Still, he never quit painting. Janet remembers helping with his easel and paints as well as picnic on outings in the mountains and along the California coast.

While he has worked in oils, he now paints almost exclusively with watercolors. His current works are representational, although he has experimented in the past with abstracts, acknowledging the influence of a teacher who trained at the Bauhaus.

"I got bored with that after a while," he says, "but the discipline helped me a great deal in the design of my paintings."

His work has grown in stature and acclaim over the years. Westinghouse, Bethlehem Steel and Kaiser Industries are among firms that display Henry Smith collections. His paintings are also included in the permanent public collections of the Hamilton Art Galleries, McMaster University, the Hamilton Public Library and the National Gallery of Canada, as well as in many private collections.

Eight years ago the Smiths retired to the Sierra. He often paints scenes he can see from their home. Among

the best, Janet says, are paintings of dogwood trees—turning color in autumn or, later in the year, covered with snow.

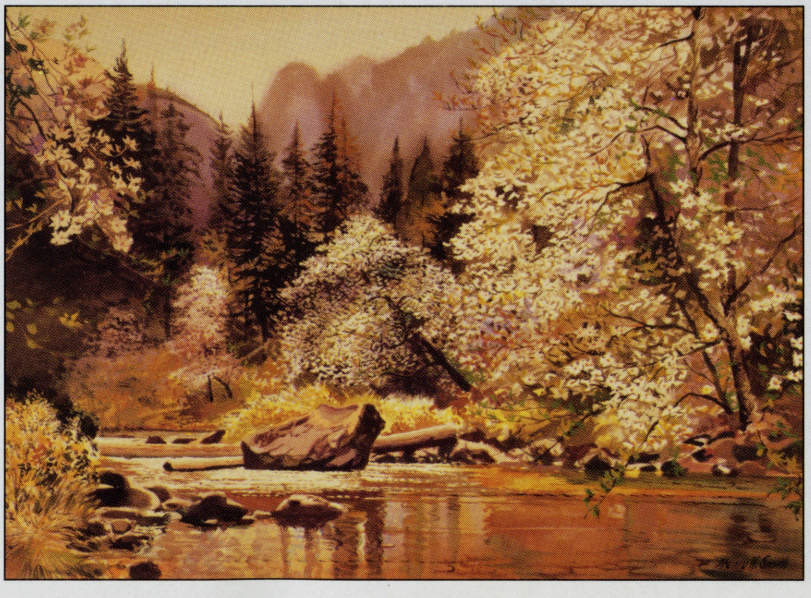
Janet now runs the Glory Hole Art Gallery in downtown Sonora and serves as a useful and valued critic of her husband's work. "She has learned to criticize paintings and to suggest subjects," he says. "In talking to the public, she has also learned what people like."

While he maintains a strong sense of his own artistic vision, Smith acknowledges he is also responsive to public taste. "Most people today know something about art," he says. "You can't look at the public simply as philistines."

Both prolific and disciplined, Smith usually begins work at 10 a.m. and paints until 6:30 in the evening. When he's particularly excited about a work in progress, though, he may get up at 4 in the morning to finish it. Sometimes he works on two or three paintings at a time. It may sound like a demanding regime, but it's one he much prefers to the "rat race" of an executive's life in the city.

"My only boss is Janet down at the gallery," he says. "She tells me to get busy and paint. Really, though, she's quite easy to work for."

Besides exhibiting his work at the Glory Hole, Smith shows his paintings at a gallery in Carmel and, every November, at the annual Forty-Niners' Encampment in Death Valley.



PHOTOS BY JEFF NIXON

Top: "Branding in the Shadow of Mt. Whitney." 29"×36" Watercolor.

Right: "The Church in Yosemite." 29"×36" Watercolor.

Below: "Merced Rider in Spring." 29"×36" Watercolor.

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MOUNTAIN LION *Continued from page 34*

"cumulative impact analysis" discussing the long-term impacts a hunt could have on the lion population.

The basis for the court ruling against the hunt was that the Commission's decision was based on insufficient data. The judge stated that meaningful research must be conducted and presented regarding, among other things, the possible cumulative impacts of hunting on the lion population. More than 29 major newpaper editorials opposing the hunt and outstanding protest were also instrumental in the Foundation's short-lived success.

"It's evident in the Commission's (new) report that it still has not addressed the problems of last year's," Negri said. "There is no meaningful analysis of the 1987 wildfires' effect on the lion population. Regional impacts, crucial to making a decision, still have not been addressed."

"In light of these oversights, I think we are back in the same place we were last year. The Commission must show clear and convincing evidence that killing 190 lions will not hurt their population," Negri said. "The burden of proof has been put on the public. It should be on the Commission."

Alan Sakarias, chairman of the San Diego chapter of the Sierra Club, said he thinks this issue is following the same path as it did last year.

"I strongly urge this Commission to withdraw the hunting proposal and instruct the Department to do the adequate research until all of the questions have been resolved," he said in his testimony before the commission. "I also urge (you to use) prudence and caution in this matter, or it will continue to be an embarassement to the Commission."

At the San Diego hearing, the commissioners appeared to be unswayed by opposition to a trophy hunt and allegations of the insufficient data presented in justification of a hunt.

Obviously, this issue is going to be the source of an ongoing battle, whether or not the Commission approves a hunt for 1988. If the hunt is approved, supporters of the lion hope a moratorium banning trophy hunting can be brought back through heavy public pressure. If for some reason it is turned down, supporters are sure to be back with equal vehemence.

Foundation information asserts that the Commission voted to approve a hunt last year, not because research suggested a need for killing lions for sport, but because the outdated wildlife management philosophies provided no other options. The Department's claim that there was no biological reason not to prohibit a hunt, they say, was typically misleading.

One speaker at the San Diego hearing told members of the Commission: "I believe your charter is to carry out the will of the people of California. The majority of Californians are opposed to this barbaric hunt. I feel you have failed as representatives of the state of California and have shortchanged its people."

Negri says that the five-member Commission, appointed by the Governor, consists of hunters who have no wildlife management skills or background. Still, she says, they must listen to public opinion, and urges supporters of efforts to preserve the big cats to continue writing letters to legislators, newspaper editors, and other opinion makers.

"Last year we were instrumental in stopping the hunt," Negri said. "I don't think we would have won the suit without all the individual help we received. People care because the mountain lion is one of their natural resources. They belong to everybody." Anyone wishing to support the The Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation or needing additional information may reach them at, P.O. Box 1896, Sacramento, CA 95809.

"If you care about something, you don't turn your back on it."
— George Schaller, New York Zoological Society

GOLDENBELL *Continued from page 18*

John C. Fremont in 1850. (For details of the colorful history of the mine and its neighbors, see the September-October 1987 issue of Sierra Life.) Under a variety of ownerships, the mining area continued to produce impressive quantities of gold ore for about 70 years.

Forty-six years after its closing during the World War II years, the mine will be reopened next year. Goldenbell estimates the cost of restarting the mining operation, including the relocation of a portion of Highway 49, will run more than $50 million. Annual operating costs are expected to run $30 million, of which $8 million will be in the form of salaries for approximately 300 mine employees, most of whom will be hired locally. The jobs will provide an economic boon to the foothill area around Mariposa, where good-paying, year-round jobs have long been at a premium.

Goldenbell engineers estimate the open pit mining will continue on the site for up to six years with potential underground operations extending the life of the mine.

The mine operators are making every effort to preserve and enhance the environment of the mine and surrounding area. Working with the State Department of Fish and Game, the mining company is developing a 546-acre wildlife habitat improvement area. The program will include brush and vegetation management, seeding of forage grasses and plants and development and maintenance of natural springs.

They have also offered assurances that precautions will be taken to provide environmental safeguards during the mining operation.

A water quality protection system has been designed for the entire project with a completely closed tailings management system. Surface water run-off is to be re-routed around tailings and overburdened storage areas in order to prevent contamination of the downstream environment. Plans developed for the mining operation include the construction of sedimentation ponds to capture run-off. Twelve wells have been drilled to monitor any effect on ground water.

Goldenbell will ensure that air quality will be protected by minimum dust generation on roads and ore crushing facilities by using the most efficient dust collection systems available. Ore roasting equipment will be outfitted by the best available control technology and air-monitoring stations will be situated around the site.

Goldenbell will have its own fire emergency vehicle and will assist in training Mariposa County's emergency service organizations.

"We expect a long and successful operation here, and we look forward to being accepted as a good, clean neighbor by the people of Mariposa," said Chuck Ager, Chairman of the Board of ABM Gold Corp., the parent company of Goldenbell Mining Corporation of Vancouver, Canada.

"Goldenbell is firmly committed to California's golden future," he added.

Tim Snyder Photo

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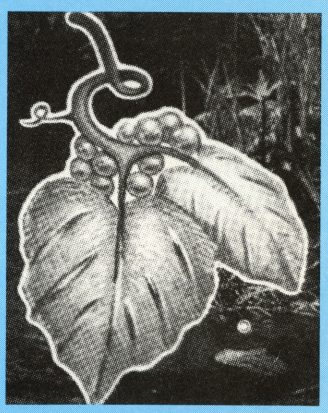

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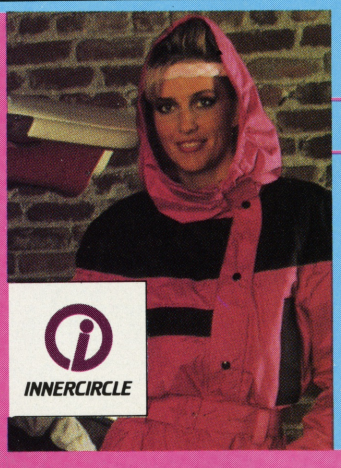

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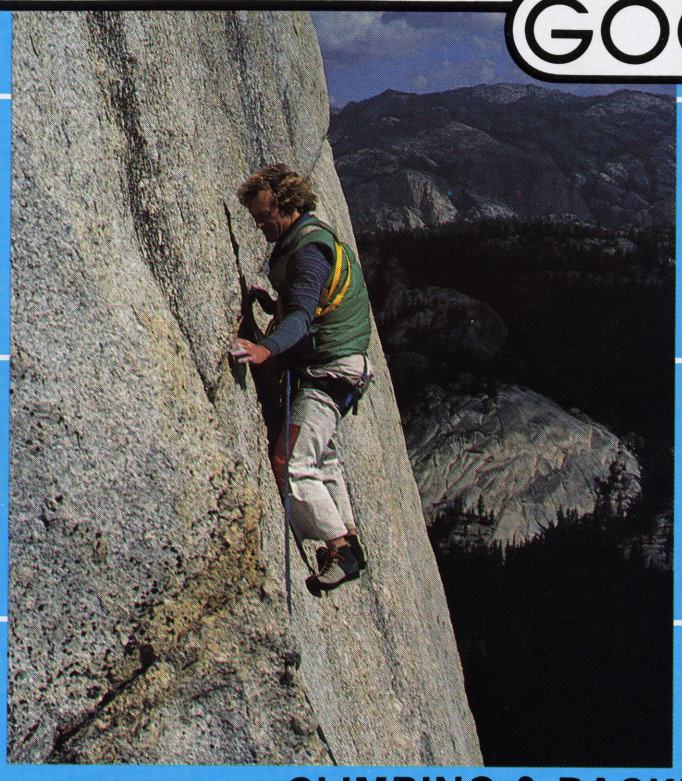

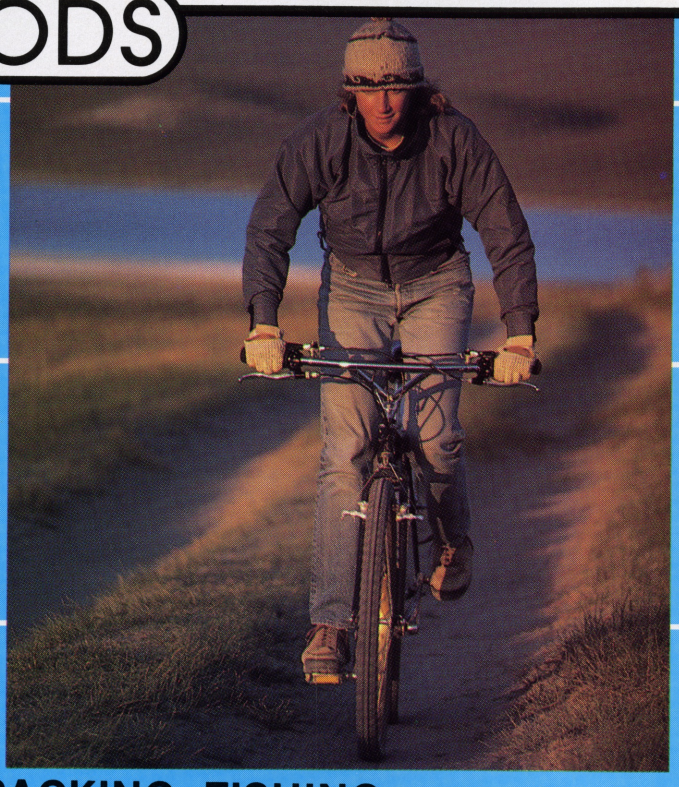

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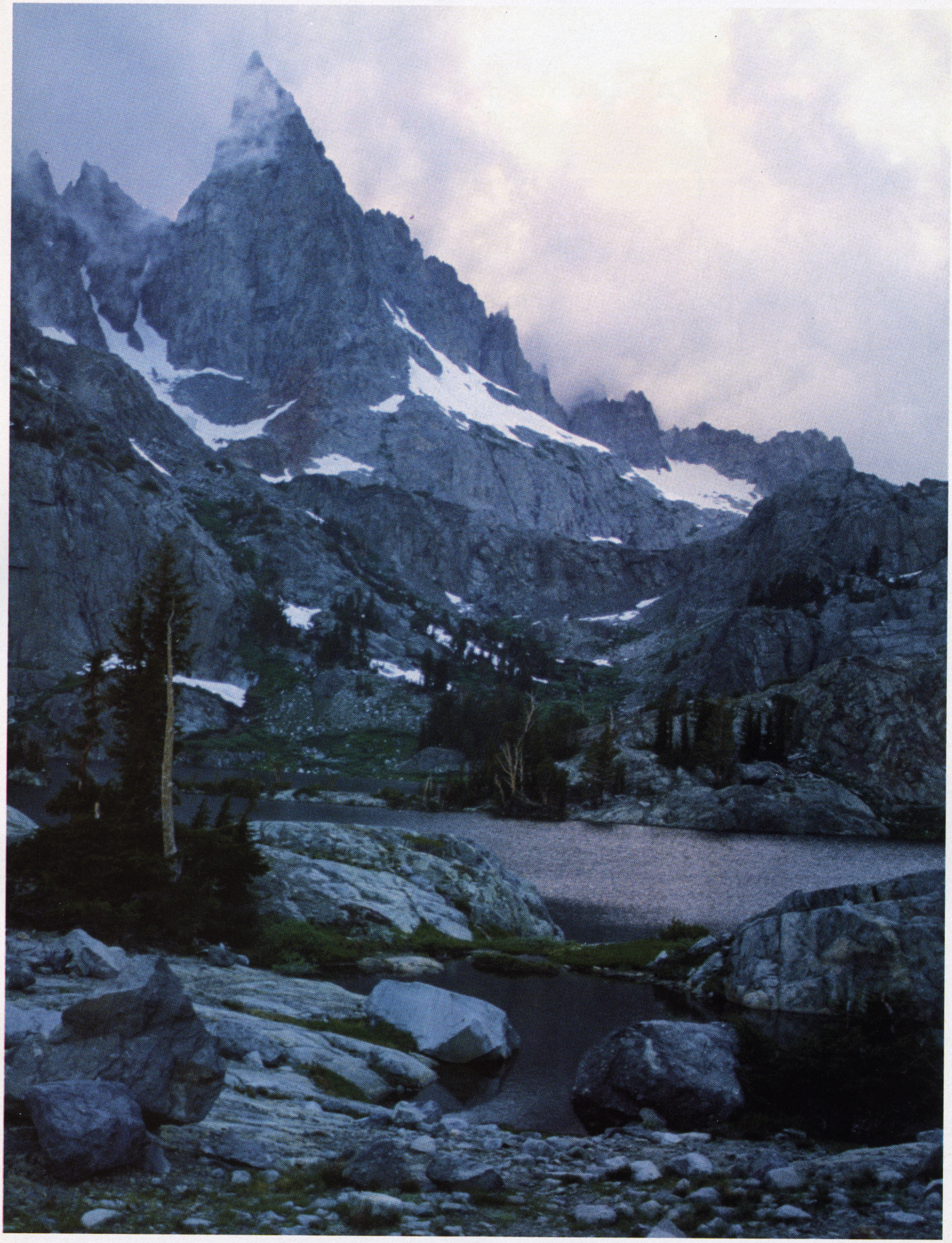

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